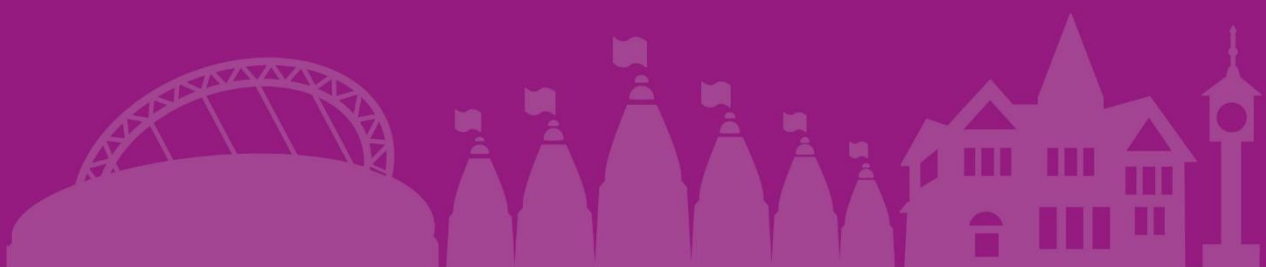


Budget Scrutiny Task Group Findings Report

Draft Budget 2025/26

28 January 2025



Foreword

This year's Budget Scrutiny Task Group Review highlights the ongoing financial crisis in local government, threatening the stability of services and communities across Brent.

While I welcome the new government's first steps towards reforming local government finance—something previous administrations long promised but failed to deliver—there is much more to be done. Positive measures, such as increased investment in addressing homelessness, the simplification of grants to allocate funding based on need rather than false competition between local councils, and the confirmation of long-awaited multi-year funding settlements, are all steps in the right direction. However, these actions fall short of the comprehensive reforms needed for local government to fully meet its responsibilities to residents. The temporary accommodation subsidy gap is just one area which must be urgently addressed to prevent growing deficits and the over-reliance on reserves across London councils.

The proposed changes to Brent's Council Tax Support Scheme—the most significant in a decade—will also have a profound impact on residents. While necessary to ensure financial stability and the sustainability of council services, the effects of these changes must be carefully monitored to avoid burdening vulnerable residents with unmanageable debt.

Despite these challenges, the council's budget setting process continues to demonstrate a commitment to prioritising those most in need. For instance, shifting to a more localised, community-based approach for social care assessments will enhance collaboration with trusted community partners, provide stronger support to residents within their own



communities and networks, and reduce barriers, like long wait times, ensuring quicker access to services during critical moments.

I would like to thank the stakeholders and community advocates who have contributed to this report. Your input is invaluable to the well-being of our communities and borough.

Cllr Rita Conneely

Chair – Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee

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Members of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group

The Budget Scrutiny Task Group was a joint effort between the council's two scrutiny committees, with representation from both the Resources and Public Realm Committee (RPR) and the Community and Wellbeing Committee (CWB). The group comprised of the following members:

Councillor Rita Conneely – Chair

Councillor Ihtesham Afzal

Councillor Janice Long

Councillor Kathleen Fraser

Councillor Michael Maurice

Task Group Terms of Reference

The following terms of reference were agreed at the RPR meeting on 4 September 2024:

1. Consider the Cabinet's budget proposals for 2025/26
2. Receive evidence from cabinet members, senior departmental officers, and any other relevant stakeholders
3. Agree a draft report to comment on the budget proposals for submission to the RPR Committee for ratification and submission to Cabinet



1. Introduction

Context:

- 1.1 Brent, like many other local authorities, continues to grapple with ever-growing service demand amid a stark absence of meaningful reform in local government finance. These challenges are compounded by the lasting impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, and persistent demographic pressures, such as an aging population and growing complexity of client needs. Most notably, the Quarter 3 2024/25 financial forecast reveals a concerning financial picture for the council. Increased homelessness and a dwindling supply of suitable temporary accommodation (TA) have driven a projected £17.6 million overspend against the revenue budget. If sustained until year end, this would require a transfer from unallocated reserves, thus depleting the council's reserves.
- 1.2 While the Autumn Statement and Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement provide much welcomed additional funding, the council faces unavoidable cost increases next year, like the indirect costs of employer National Insurance contributions. These new expenses, combined with existing inflationary pressures and high demand for services, necessitate a continued focus on prudent financial management.
- 1.3 To achieve a balanced budget in 2025/26, the council must generate £16 million in savings. This is proposed through a combination of service cuts (£4.4m), a reduction in Council Tax Support (£5m), operational efficiencies (£6.5m), and a 4.99% Council Tax increase (including a 2.99% general increase and a 2% Adult Social Care Precept).
- 1.4 The council's final budget position will be determined following the announcement of the Final Local Government Settlement and the subsequent publication of the final Budget 2025/26 ahead of Brent's Cabinet meeting on 10 February 2025.
- 1.5 The Task Group's findings are therefore based on the assumptions outlined in the Draft Budget 2025/26.

Role of Task Group:

- 1.6 Brent's decision-making framework gives a clear and important role to Overview and Scrutiny in budget-setting. The process for developing proposals for the budget and capital programme is outlined in the Brent Council Constitution, Part 2, Standing Order 19. This requires that the Cabinet's budget proposals be considered by the council's RPR Scrutiny Committee. Upon completion of its review of the proposals, the committee will submit a report outlining its deliberations and comments to the Cabinet.
- 1.7 At its meeting on 4 September 2024, the RPR Committee established a Budget Scrutiny Task Group to scrutinise the Draft Budget 2025/26¹. The Task Group held a series of meetings between October and December 2024 to prepare this report. These included internal discussions to refine the Task Group's findings and recommendations, and engagements with the Cabinet, Corporate Management Team, and key partners (please see section 6 for full list of participants). Through these sessions, the panel sought to identify and assess key budget pressures, risks, and

¹ Establishment of Budget Task Group Report (September 2024):
<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s144282/07.%20Establishment%20Scrutiny%20Budget%20Task%20Group%20Sept%202024.pdf>

uncertainties, rigorously test the assumptions underlying the draft budget, examine resource allocation strategies, and consider the overall impact of the budget proposals on residents and partners.

- 1.8 For the purposes outlined in the Constitution, this report will be considered by the RPR Committee on Tuesday 28 January 2025. Pending agreement, the report will then be presented to Cabinet for consideration on Monday 10 February 2025, alongside the report from the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources on the final budget proposals for 2025/26.
- 1.9 Cabinet will recommend a budget for approval at Full Council on Thursday 27 February 2025.
- 1.10 The Task Group seeks to act as a 'critical friend' and hopes to stimulate constructive debate on the Draft Budget 2025/26. We encourage the Cabinet to carefully consider our recommendations and take them forward.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Budget Scrutiny Task Group makes the following recommendations to Cabinet:

Recommendation 1– Leverage Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) for Optimal Community Benefit

The Task Group acknowledges the stringent regulations governing the allocation and spend of SCIL and is aware of the serious consequences that can arise from non-compliance, including legal challenges, potential loss of funding, and reputational damage.

However, rather than a coordinated, strategic approach, there appears to be a fragmented or 'piecemeal' approach to fund allocation. For instance, funding applications are approved on a case-by-case basis rather than through a structured prioritisation strategy with defined bidding windows. This disjointed process is hindering the efficient use of SCIL funds in alignment with the council's broader strategic priorities, limiting their potential impact to deliver critical infrastructure and community benefits.

The Task Group recommends that the council:

- **Review the current approach for allocating and spending SCIL that ensures better alignment with borough needs, a more balanced distribution of funds across borough plan priorities, and that facilitates creative investment into budgetary high-priority areas (e.g. key departmental budgetary pressure/ risk areas) as far as legally permissible and;**
- **Continue to advocate for local government finance reform that provides local authorities greater autonomy in generating, allocating, and spending their resources, including the flexible use of funds such as SCIL.**

Recommendation 2 – Enhance cost efficiency and value for money in Commissioning and Procurement

There is an increasing urgency for the council to identify and address any inefficiencies in commissioned contracts, actively seeking opportunities for cost reductions/streamlining.

The planned increase in employer National Insurance contributions, poses a significant risk, where partners, such as care providers, are likely to pass on these additional costs through higher fees to the council. Furthermore, some commissioned contracts and partnership initiatives have fallen short of delivering optimal value for money, highlighting the need for a careful assessment on how these contracts have been historically managed across the organisation. This involves evaluating the consistency and effectiveness of contract oversight within departments and at a council-wide level, and applying lessons learnt to develop a strengthened holistic approach moving forward.

Key policies, including the Procurement Strategy and the Social Value Ethical Strategy, remain outdated, a concern recently highlighted by the External Auditors, Grant Thornton, despite prior commitments for the council to review these documents on an annual basis. There is an opportunity to update these strategies to align with forthcoming changes in legislation and the 2023-27 Borough Plan, while also better integrating community wealth-building principles into council practices. This will foster a more equitable and sustainable local economy, presenting real opportunities for improving civic participation, strengthening local capacity, advancing social equity, fortifying local supply chains, and creating more job opportunities in the borough.

The Task Group recommends an urgent review of the council's procurement and commissioning processes to enhance its capacity to meet strategic objectives, maximise value for money, and, most importantly, ensure that the needs and perspectives of residents and service users are at the heart of service design. Specifically, we advocate that there should be a thorough exploration of 'participatory community wealth-building' practices, such as the use of community-led panels in defining commissioning and procurement priorities, determining service specifications, shaping community-led social value priorities, assessing tenders, and monitoring service performance, social value, economic and wider social impact. The suggested actions could uncover substantial savings, potentially offsetting some of the current financial pressures and reducing the need for further difficult decisions in future budgets. The review would also provide the newly established Strategic Commissioning and Capacity Building department opportunities to realign relationships, shared goals, and expectations with other council departments, partners, and service providers.

Recommendation 3 – Boost Investment in Debt Recovery

The Task Group is concerned by the council's relatively low collection rates, particularly for Council Tax and Business Rates, which raises broader questions about the effectiveness of its debt recovery strategies. A failure to effectively collect these debts not only impacts the council's immediate cash flow but also undermines long-term financial stability, potentially forcing the council to rely more heavily on external borrowing or diminishing government grant funding. It is acknowledged that a significant portion of outstanding debt may be uncollectable due to poverty and the ongoing cost of living crisis, which is likely to continue especially with the reduction to the Council Tax Support Scheme.

However, pursuing recoverable debts from those who simply are avoiding paying is crucial in maximising the council's income, which in turn strengthens the organisation's capacity to provide vital support services for those residents most in need in the borough. A strong debt recovery approach has the potential to generate substantial financial returns, improving financial management, enabling more accurate forecasting and budgeting, reducing dependence on reserves, and minimising the need for cuts to frontline services in future budgets.

The Task Group recommends that the council strategically prioritises and enhances investment in its debt recovery efforts to improve collection rates, specifically targeting those who are avoiding paying.

Recommendation 4 – Strengthen Financial Reserves

The Task Group commends the council for its strong track record of financial resilience, and notes achievements such as £3m in cost avoidance resulting from effective spending controls. The challenging financial circumstances facing the council are also understood. Dwindling reserves are primarily attributed to a lack and uncertainty in government funding, as well as unprecedented homelessness and TA pressures, rather than financial mismanagement, highlighting the need for urgent reform. Additionally, matters have been exacerbated by increased operational costs due to prolonged periods of high inflation, elevated interest rates, and a surge in demand driven by demographic changes, especially in areas such as social care and housing.

At the same time, The Task Group echoes the concerns raised by the External Auditors regarding the depletion of reserves. The ongoing reliance on useable reserves to deal with unplanned expenditure poses a significant risk to the council's long term financial sustainability. This concern is further heightened by additional factors, such as the potential need to use General Fund reserves to cover the council's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit if central government ends the statutory override that currently allows local authorities to hold deficit balances. With the override set to expire by 2026/27, this situation could push the council to seek Exceptional Financial Support from central government.

The Task Group recommends that the council prioritises rebuilding strong financial reserves, particularly the general reserves and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) reserves, as a core component of its short and medium-term financial planning, while enhancing spending controls to reduce costs.

Recommendation 5 – Effective Implementation of Task Group Recommendations

While the Task Group is pleased to note that the majority of recommendations submitted to Cabinet on previous draft budgets have been accepted, issues remain regarding the consistency of implementation. Despite receiving written assurances from Cabinet on progress through the RPR Committee's scrutiny recommendations tracker, the group has observed instances where implementation has fallen short of expectations. For example, the recommendation from last year's Budget Scrutiny Task Group Review to strengthen partnership working with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) has not been fully realised. A recent meeting with key VCS organisations confirmed a lack of consistent dialogue throughout the financial year on crucial issues like the upcoming budget. This pattern of belated engagement with the VCS, where budget discussions occur after draft proposals have already been published, continues to be a concern. Additionally, the Cabinet's previous commitment to clearly outline the climate and environmental implications of each budget proposal, as recommended last year, appears to have been inadequately addressed. This is evident in draft proposals such as NR01 25-26, which notably omit these critical considerations.

The Task Group recommends that the Cabinet establish a robust monitoring process to ensure effective implementation of accepted Task Group recommendations.

Enhanced monitoring processes will promote greater accountability and public trust in council decision-making, helping to minimise disruptions resulting from changes in Cabinet portfolios and organisational shifts within the organisation.

3. Evidence Sessions

- 3.1 The Budget Scrutiny Task Group conducted a series of meetings with the Cabinet, the Corporate Management Team, and key partners to assess the viability of the Draft Budget 2025/26 to inform its recommendations.
- 3.2 During the process, the group also examined key documents, including:
- Quarter 2 Financial Forecast 2024/25²
 - Quarter 3 Financial Forecast 2024/25³
 - Draft Budget 2025/26 (inclusive of the revised Medium Term Financial Outlook and the additional budget proposals for 2025/26)⁴
 - Strategic Risk Register⁵
 - Draft Consultation and Engagement Plan

Work Planning Session

- 3.3 This meeting was held on 24 October 2024.
- 3.4 Task Group members discussed and agreed the approach to be taken to scrutinise the Draft Budget 2025/26. This consisted of:
- A stakeholder session with key VCS partners to analyse the budget proposals and temperature check the impact and assumptions that sit behind them
 - An evidence session to review the council's approach to Treasury Management and borrowing; as well as its updated Medium Term Financial Outlook, and the budget proposals put forward for the following directorates: Finance and Resources, Law and Governance, Neighbourhoods and Regeneration, and Partnerships, Housing and Resident Services
 - An evidence session on the remaining proposals for the Community Health and Wellbeing, and Children and Young People directorates
 - A final evidence session to share reflections, hear any additional evidence and to discuss and agree the draft recommendations

²Q2 Financial Forecast 2024/25 Report (November 2024):
<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s145713/08.%20Q2%2024-25%20Financial%20Report%20-%20Scrutiny.pdf>

³ Q3 Financial Forecast 2024/25 Report (January 2025):
<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s146852/08.%20Q3%202024-25%20Financial%20Report.pdf>

⁴ Draft Budget 2025/26 (November 2024):
<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=455&MId=7982>

⁵ Strategic Risk Report (October 2024):
<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s145581/05.%20Strategic%20Risk%20Update%20-%20September%202024.pdf>

3.5 The following areas and themes were identified for review:

1. Brent Council's **Medium Term Financial Outlook**, including the overall financial position.
2. **The impact of inflation** on Brent Council's budget pressures and performance.
3. **The impact of rising interest rates** on Brent Council's budget pressures and performance.
4. **The impact of the uncertainty in central government funding** on Brent Council's operations and performance.
5. **The impact of the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East** on Brent Council's budget pressures and performance.
6. **The impact of the Cost of Living Crisis** on Brent Council's budget pressures and performance.
7. **The impact of Covid-19** on Brent Council's budget pressures and performance.
8. Ringfenced budgets e.g. **HRA, Schools and the DSG**, and the **Public Health Grant**.
9. The **Capital Programme** of the council.
10. Council **reserves** and the **Reserves Strategy**
11. Key departmental **overspends and underspends**
12. **Service Specific Pressures, Risks, Uncertainties, and Mitigations**
13. **Current/future budget assumptions** e.g. income assumptions, spending assumptions etc.
14. The **proposed budget setting process for 2025/26**
15. **The impact of budget proposals for 2025/26** on service delivery and customer satisfaction
16. **Council Tax** and Council Tax Support Scheme
17. Business Rates
18. Options for **Income Generation**
19. **Treasury Management** e.g. investments, borrowing, minimum revenue provision (MRP) etc.
20. Budget **Consultation**

Stakeholder Session

3.6 This meeting was held on 25 November 2024 with colleagues from the VCS (a full list of participants in the Budget Scrutiny Task Group Review is outlined in section 6 of this report).

3.7 The Deputy Director of Finance opened the session with a scene-setting overview of Brent's current financial situation. The economic environment was described as volatile and uncertain, whereby the council had already made £222 million in cuts since 2010 with a further £16 million in cuts and operating efficiencies being proposed for 2025/26 to set a legally balanced budget. This is in addition to the proposed 4.99% increase to Council Tax (consisting of a 2.99% general increase plus 2% for the Adult Social Care Precept).

3.8 Key financial risk areas highlighted included:

- Inflationary and interest rates pressures
- Uncertainty and insufficient central government funding:
 - Single-year funding settlements, hindering long-term financial planning

- Declining core funding from central government (down 20% in the past 14 years) coupled with an 11% population increase, resulting in a 28% reduction in real terms funding per person since 2010 etc.
 - Homelessness and TA pressures:
 - Increased demand and reduced supply of suitable housing
 - Increased reliance on high-cost accommodation options
 - Housing subsidy loss
 - Social care pressures:
 - Staff recruitment and retention challenges
 - Rising demand for services, driven by demographic changes
 - Escalating contractual costs
- 3.9 The Task Group then proceeded to gather feedback from partners on the proposals, identifying any potential concerns, gaps, and/or opportunities in the Draft Budget 2025/26. They also sought to understand stakeholder experiences, challenges and priorities in the context of the current economic environment, while exploring where they believe council investment should be targeted in the coming year and beyond.
- 3.10 Areas of discussion included:
- **Proposed 4.99% increase in Council Tax and reduction to Council Tax Support Scheme:** These proposals are likely to negatively affect residents' ability to maintain stable housing, particularly those in employment who are already struggling financially. While alternative financial support options will be available for residents facing hardship, it is still very likely that there will be a decline in Council Tax collection rates. Council Tax is already a major source of debt for many service users, and if these proposals proceed, demand for support is likely to increase significantly. This growing need must be carefully managed in close collaboration with the VCS to ensure it can adequately meet growing demand. Nonetheless, it would have been helpful for the council to have engaged the sector ahead of the publication of the draft proposals to enhance its planning efforts for the likely increased demand it will experience.
 - **1.2% increase to employer's national insurance contributions:** There are anxieties that the VCS may have to absorb these additional costs while also implementing the London Living Wage increases, navigating heightened competition for charitable funding, and increased demand for support. Thus, there is an imminent need for the council to work closely with the sector to implement timely and effective mitigations/solutions, ensuring that service cuts or delays are prevented. Engagement should not be limited to Brent CVS but should also involve direct consultations with local organisations that possess the diverse knowledge and expertise needed to develop tailored solutions in alignment with the council's strategic priorities.
 - **SCIL:** The current underutilisation of SCIL funds should be addressed to better align with local needs, ensure a more balanced distribution across borough plan priorities, and enable targeted investment into high-priority budget areas. This will need to continue to be in accordance with current regulations. Similarly, there is a pressing need to intensify lobbying efforts for local government financial reform that grants local authorities' greater autonomy over spending decisions (such as more flexible use of SCIL funds). Positive changes in this area could help local authorities

minimise future budget cuts that would severely impact both the sector and local residents.

- **Clarity in proposals:** As highlighted last year, there is a need for the council to better communicate the potential impact and expectations of proposals on both residents and partners. A key example is proposal CHW02 25-26 ('Modernise Adult Social Care Approach to Assessment and Review'). While the prospect of community-based assessments holds significant potential for positive outcomes if implemented effectively, the proposal lacks clarity on whether voluntary and community sector partners are expected to conduct the assessments on behalf of the council, or if the process will be a collaborative effort.
- **Alignment with strategic priorities in the Borough Plan 2023 – 27:** As noted in previous years, the draft budget for 2025/26 lacks full alignment with the priorities/commitments set out in the Borough Plan. For instance, climate change and environmental considerations are absent from several proposals. Despite cabinet assurances that additional screening would be implemented to outline climate and environmental impacts, this is still not explicit. A notable example is proposal NR01 25-26 ('Increase the charge for accessing the bulky waste collection service from £40 to £55'), which could potentially lead to higher rates of fly tipping across the borough.

3.11 It was highlighted that council investment should be prioritised in:

- **'Invest to Save' initiatives:** Noting the growing ageing population, an example could be greater investment into preventative services, which evidence shows could lead to longer-term savings and improved outcomes.
- **Single Homelessness Prevention:** Although homelessness and the demand for TA are widespread challenges faced by many authorities, Brent provides temporary housing to a significantly low proportion of verified rough sleepers. To effectively address the rising number of rough sleepers in the borough, additional investment in single homelessness services is essential.
- **Strengthening partnerships with the VCS:** The sector possesses valuable local knowledge and the business acumen to develop successful funding bids for service provision and could assist the council in its income generation efforts (e.g. through joint grant applications). The council should therefore treat the VCS as an equal partner and work more closely with them to co-design and transform services, especially considering the financial pressures faced by both the council and the sector. A starting point for this collaboration could involve reviving the thematic groups⁶ to revisit the draft proposals. This would allow exploration of additional income opportunities and ways to mitigate the impact of proposed changes on the sector, such as identifying alternative funders or service providers for services at risk of reduction or elimination. Going forward, it is essential that discussions with the VCS regarding proposals that may directly or indirectly affect them take place well in advance of the publication of draft budget proposals. This collaborative approach will ensure that the sector has a voice in the decision-making process and can effectively plan for any anticipated increase in demand.

⁶ For further details on the thematic groups, please refer to the Brent Voluntary and Community Sector Report (May 2021):
<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s110101/7.%20Brent%20Voluntary%20and%20Community%20Sector.pdf>

Evidence Session 1

- 3.12 This meeting was held on 28 November 2024.
- 3.13 Key participants included the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Enforcement, Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Community Power, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, Jobs and Skills, Cabinet Member for Housing and Resident Services, Chief Executive, Corporate Director - Finance and Resources, Corporate Director - Law and Governance, Corporate Director - Partnerships, Housing and Resident Services, Director - Public Realm, Director - Inclusive Regeneration and Employment, Deputy Director of Finance, and Head of Revenues and Debt.
- 3.14 Following a scene-setting presentation from senior officers on the current financial situation, which sparked constructive debate on key strategic areas of council business, the Task Group undertook a thorough review of budgetary matters within the following directorates:
- Finance and Resources
 - Law and Governance
 - Neighbourhoods and Regeneration
 - Partnerships, Housing and Resident Services

Scene-Setting

- 3.15 The Task Group was presented with a stark picture of the council's precarious financial position:
- **A volatile economic climate, creating mounting financial strain:** High inflation, increased service demand, and ongoing government funding cuts have created significant budgetary pressures for the organisation. Significant overspends, primarily driven by escalating costs in TA and social care, have depleted reserves.
 - **Limited relief from government support:** While the Autumn Statement provided some funding, it falls short of addressing the full extent of social care and homelessness pressures. The impact of the National Insurance Contributions increase remains uncertain.
 - **Urgent action required:** Spending controls have been implemented, achieving £3 million in cost avoidance. Additionally, a £10 million in-year savings target is in place, and further savings of £16 million are proposed for 2025/26. A 4.99% Council Tax increase is also recommended to balance the budget.
 - **Risk of financial collapse:** Continued service pressures without significant reform to local government funding could lead to an Emergency Financial Support situation within five years.

Key Budget Assumptions:

- 3.16 The Task Group discussed and sought clarity on the robustness of budget assumptions made in the Draft Budget 2025/26 and revised Medium Term Financial Outlook.
- 3.17 The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources highlighted the success of prior forecasting efforts, outlining the scenario modelling and sensitivity analysis performed

before the release of the draft budget. This process involved a detailed examination of the current costs, drivers, and requirements of each directorate, as well as close collaboration with external experts to ensure the accuracy of the modelling approach.

- 3.18 The core assumptions were grounded in the information available to the council at the time of formation and would be reviewed as needed, such as following the release of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement. It was also noted that, although these assumptions had proven reliable in the past, areas of overspending would continue to present challenges for forecasting. For instance, predicting costs in areas like children's services remains particularly difficult, as even a single additional child requiring support can lead to a substantial rise in cost pressures.

Cumulative impact of budget cuts to date:

- 3.19 The Task Group expressed concerns about ongoing staffing reductions, particularly the deletion of vacant positions, and questioned how the council was balancing the need for resource efficiency with the potential long-term effects of overburdening staff and impacting staff morale. In response, detail was provided on the strategies used to manage organisational transformation, staffing reductions, voluntary redundancies, natural turnover, and levels of sickness. Emphasis was placed on the critical role of managers/senior leaders in maintaining staff motivation and offering support, including the need to engage with staff about the challenges and opportunities facing the council. The use of staff surveys to monitor and address potential demotivation was also highlighted.
- 3.20 More broadly, scrutiny members raised concerns about the cumulative impact of past cuts on local communities and the lack of access to this information during the review. It was emphasised that the council needs to better understand the wider, long-term consequences of budget cuts since austerity in order to effectively manage the present and plan for the future. By examining the historical context of cuts, the council could avoid short-term fixes that merely postpone or worsen the consequences of past decisions, and instead prioritise longer-term solutions, leading to sustainable financial strategies and more strategic resource allocation and investment across the organisation. The need for an audit of cumulative impacts of past cuts was acknowledged, though it was not a current priority. The primary focus remained on addressing the immediate financial challenges. Any future review of past budget decisions would only be pursued if backed by a robust cost-benefit analysis, and would be more relevant if the council were to secure multi-year funding agreements.

Reserves:

- 3.21 The Task Group raised concerns regarding the depletion of available reserves, and queried how these would be rebuilt as part of the budget setting strategy for 2025/26. This is especially the case as current reserve levels are unlikely to provide sufficient financial flexibility to respond effectively to unexpected emergencies. In response, it was emphasised that replenishing reserves was critical, with plans to use any one-off funding to support this. Other strategies under consideration include making additional savings or allocating extra government grants to reserves instead of the base budget. However, this approach is not sustainable, and the Cabinet will continue lobbying for changes to the funding formula, with key discussions expected in Spring 2025. The outcome will influence future decisions on service delivery and funding.

Fees and Charges:

- 3.22 The Task Group explored how the council will ensure transparency and justify any significant increases to essential service fees and charges. Scrutiny members suggested that any increases should be strategically targeted towards commercial entities rather than residents. Officers acknowledged this perspective while emphasising the legal constraints on fee increases, which are limited to cost recovery without generating profit. Consequently, the focus was on striking a balance in setting fees and charges to ensure they remain affordable while adequately covering departmental costs for service delivery.

Unlocking Potential: Innovation, Efficiency, and Investment Strategies:

- 3.23 Concerned by the lack of long-term, innovative cost-saving measures in the Draft Budget 2025/26, the Task Group examined approaches that could help the council adjust its savings plans, generate new income, and alleviate current financial pressures through creative and collaborative solutions.

‘Invest to Save’:

- 3.24 Further clarification was requested regarding the council's investment strategy, with a particular focus on its 'invest to save' approach (i.e. measures to save the council more money long term and to prevent prevailing issues escalating out of control).
- 3.25 The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources explained that the investment strategy had two components: investment in services for transformation and investment of cashable money for returns. Regarding the latter, the Task Group received assurances that the council regularly reviewed its treasury management strategy, balancing cash balances, borrowing, and investments. Over the past 10-15 years, the council had used internal borrowing, utilising SCIL money to delay external borrowing. This approach was prudent given the higher cost of borrowing compared to savings rates. Nonetheless, it was reiterated that the council had not pursued highly ambitious investments due to the associated risks and lack of expertise in making profitable returns. Examples of failed investments by other councils were cited, highlighting the importance of caution. The council's focus remained on building social housing, which offers long-term benefits beyond financial returns.
- 3.26 The Task Group endorsed the above-mentioned approach, but emphasised the need for increased council investment in preventive and innovative measures that will yield long-term cost savings, similar to last year's budget. Planned initiatives, such as the forthcoming council-owned children's home, were highlighted as key examples of this strategy in action.

SCIL:

- 3.27 The Task Group revisited previous conversations about whether the council had explored opportunities to use SCIL funds to help address budgetary challenges. In response, it was highlighted that the council had taken a cautious stance on using SCIL funds to ensure adherence to strict legal regulations, and consequently had not actively sought opportunities to incorporate these funds into the draft budget. However, the potential for leveraging SCIL funds to support climate action initiatives was identified as an area worthy of exploration moving forward.
- 3.28 While scrutiny members acknowledged the importance of a cautious approach, it maintained that the council could do more to strategically utilise SCIL funds as part of

its investment strategy. It was therefore proposed that the Cabinet focus on determining priority investment areas in line with the borough plan and local needs, rather than relying on a reactive and fragmented approach where departments submit individual applications for SCIL funding sporadically.

Insourcing:

- 3.29 Further inquiries were made around whether the council should pursue insourcing opportunities, highlighting risk factors such as the 1.2% increase in National Insurance contributions to employers. Officers acknowledged this challenge, expressing concern about the lack of government announcement on funding allocations and the potential cost burden on the council, particularly in social care. Nonetheless, any new government funding might have to be used to offset any uplifts to contracts although this would not cover demand or complexity in cases.
- 3.30 It was noted that insourcing services that are not currently within the council's core service delivery may not be practical due to resource constraints. This could involve significant investments in new staff, training, and infrastructure, with the risk of cost overruns. While acknowledging this concern, scrutiny members advocated for a standard practice of evaluating the feasibility of insourcing during contract renewals. This proactive approach enables a comprehensive evaluation of both the potential benefits and potential drawbacks.

Grant Funding:

- 3.31 The Task Group sought information about the council's success in securing and maximising grants over the past year, and whether more opportunities could be realised in this area to increase income. In response, it was stated that the council had been successful in obtaining grants, with ongoing efforts to secure additional funding mentioned, particularly for environmental initiatives such as tree planting. Scrutiny members commended this work and encouraged continued proactive efforts to secure grant funding, which was in alignment with previous recommendations, such as exploring match-funding and joint bids.

Consultation and Engagement:

- 3.32 The Task Group welcomed the opportunity to review the draft Communications and Engagement Plan for the 2025/26 Budget consultation in early October 2024. However, following discussions with key partners from the VCS in November 2024, additional areas for improvement were identified.
- 3.33 Feedback from group's stakeholder session revealed that the discussion was the first instance in which the VCS were consulted on the Draft Budget 2025/26. This raises concerns, as the budget-setting process (alongside relevant consultation efforts) should be led by the executive rather than scrutiny. A gentle reminder was issued regarding the Cabinet's commitment to engage the VCS in the budget-setting process as early as possible and throughout the financial year, rather than waiting until draft proposals are published, as often the sector is a majorly affected party.
- 3.34 The respective cabinet member committed to addressing these gaps in engagement. It was mentioned that Brent CVS was under review/transition, and the aim was to improve capacity and engagement with the wider VCS moving forward, leading to better outcomes. The Task Group welcomed this but stressed the need for direct engagement to also take place with a variety of organisations from the sector to leverage their local knowledge and expertise. This would also enable greater

opportunities to access joint external funding opportunities. Individual VCS organisations were eager to collaborate on solutions from January 2025 onwards.

HRA:

- 3.35 The Task Group raised concerns about the significant challenges facing the HRA, emphasising the need for a robust plan to ensure its long-term financial sustainability.
- 3.36 The Corporate Director of Partnerships, Housing and Resident Services acknowledged the apprehensions raised, noting a £90 million reduction to the 30-year business plan. This shortfall had made development projects for council-owned TA no longer financially viable. The cost-of-living crisis had driven up repair expenses, with material prices having significantly increased, while the council couldn't raise rents beyond the statutory limit, which lagged behind inflation. Compliance with new legislation, such as fire safety regulations, further strained finances. Additionally, the HRA's limited reserves, at only £2.4 million (4% of gross rent), fall significantly below the 5% target and the Brent peer average. These reserves are projected to remain low over the next five years and could be depleted by the planned re-procurement of the repairs contract. This is particularly concerning given the need for substantial investments in fire safety, property retrofitting, the tower block programme, and affordable housing within the borough, as just a few to mention.
- 3.37 Recognising the need to make difficult decisions to re-appraise HRA budget priorities and service delivery methods to achieve a balanced budget, scrutiny members stressed the importance of enhanced oversight of the HRA by the CWB Scrutiny Committee going forward.

Capital Programme:

- 3.38 The Task Group acknowledged the uncertainty within the capital programme and requested additional information on the impact and mitigations of key risks, including interest rate fluctuations, potential increases in borrowing costs, growing demand for affordable housing, and project delays.
- 3.39 Scrutiny members sought assurances on how value for money would be ensured in building schemes and how the council would be protected from unexpected remedial costs due to potential defects. In response, it was emphasised that value for money is a priority, balanced with factors like contract suitability and competition (e.g. providing offers that would attract developers to bid on contracts etc). Additionally, it was explained that the council retains 2.5% of contractors' monthly invoices for financial protection against defects. Half of this retention is released after practical completion, with the remainder held during a 12-month defects liability period to address any issues.

Finance and Resources

- 3.40 The Task Group were satisfied that the directorate's proposals minimised any potential negative impact on residents as much as possible. If any new information emerges, it should be clearly reflected in the details of the relevant proposals.

Law and Governance

Outsourcing the provision of Occupational Health services:

- 3.41 The Task Group queried the council's plans to mitigate the risk of reduced responsiveness and/or longer waiting times once the service is outsourced, specifically querying the measures to ensure urgent cases were prioritised appropriately.
- 3.42 The concerns raised were acknowledged by the Corporate Director of Law and Governance, with the emphasis that the reliability of outsourced services hinges on the specifications and terms outlined in the future contract. It was noted that effective contract monitoring, supported by clear performance metrics, is essential to ensure timely responses and the swift resolution of urgent cases.
- 3.43 Scrutiny members questioned whether the council had considered alternative delivery models, such as shared service arrangements with other local authorities. In response, it was highlighted that there had been no interest in pursuing a shared service for occupational health services, as most councils prefer to commission these services from external providers. This approach helps councils avoid additional costs, such as pension liabilities.

Deletion of two trainee positions:

- 3.44 The Task Group enquired about the potential impacts of this proposal, specifically the impact on the long-term capacity and expertise within the legal department, and the steps being taken to ensure that the current workforce can manage the increased workload whilst maintaining the quality of service it offers. In response, it was highlighted that the council would utilise the apprenticeship levy to fund qualifications for existing legal assistants to pursue qualifications that will lead to solicitor roles, ensuring long-term skills and expertise in the department. Additionally, cross-training programmes and participation in the London Boroughs Legal Alliance's training programmes would be a measure utilised to uphold continuous development and service quality within the department.

Neighbourhoods and Regeneration

Increased charge for accessing the bulky waste collection service:

- 3.45 The Task Group observed that the council currently charges significantly less for bulky waste collection compared to neighbouring boroughs. They questioned whether comparisons had been made with boroughs like Harrow, which charge similar fees to the proposed increase, in order to project potential additional income and assess whether the proposal is financially sound and worthwhile. In response, the Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Enforcement confirmed that the fees for this service in neighbouring boroughs had been reviewed prior to submitting this proposal. For transparency, it was clarified that the decision to increase fees for bulky waste collection has since been agreed to be taken as an early in-year saving. This means this proposal will push ahead and will no longer be a part of the current budget consultation.
- 3.46 Scrutiny members asked questions about whether any concessions were available to support individuals with lower incomes who might struggle to afford the service. In response, it was clarified that a range of concessions were already in place to meet the needs of those with low incomes and would continue to be offered. The Task Group stressed the importance of improving communication to raise awareness of these

concessions. Additionally, the group encouraged the cabinet member to consider further options for a tiered system, including lower cost single-item collections (such as for small items like microwaves and air fryers), in order to reduce the risk of fly-tipping and provide more affordable and accessible disposal options for items that cannot be discarded through traditional means.

Increased garden waste annual subscription:

- 3.47 The Task Group enquired about the forecasted figures around the potential loss of subscribers as a result of the increased subscription fee. In response, it was highlighted that the subscription service was utilised by residents who had a genuine need for it, as they had gardens that required maintenance. Given that residents have consistently remained loyal despite previous increases in fees, it is expected that the subscription rate will not see a significant drop. Historical data supports this expectation, as the annual fee has risen from £40 to £65 over the years, yet the number of subscribers has remained stable at around 20,000. The department was therefore confident that a small increase in the subscription fee will have minimal impact, especially since the increase is aligned with neighbouring boroughs. This adjustment will allow the council to maintain a high-quality service without compromising its standard.
- 3.48 Scrutiny members noted the response provided and stressed the need for climate and environmental considerations to be included under this proposal, as well as other relevant proposals. The Cabinet member for Climate Action and Community Power accepted this feedback, committing to rectifying this information in the proposals.

Staffing and Structures Review of Public Realm, Regeneration, and Strategic Housing:

- 3.49 Additional details were requested on what the saving entailed and the impact on service delivery. It was clarified that this proposal related to ongoing restructuring within the directorate, including a voluntary redundancy programme. This presented positive opportunities to review and reorganise frontline teams to better serve local community needs, with further options identified to improve service delivery. It was stressed that the overall impact on the service would remain manageable.

Staffing efficiencies and contract spend within the Shared Technology Service:

- 3.50 The Task Group expressed concerns about the potential impact of this proposal on cybersecurity, given its significant position on the strategic risk register, and requested more information on how the council plans to maintain the security and resilience of its IT infrastructure. In response, it was mentioned that cuts were proposed to staffing and services, not to infrastructure and resilience, ensuring that the safety and security of the system would remain intact, supported by a recent £10 million capital investment.
- 3.51 Scrutiny members tasked the respective cabinet member to continue discussions with Lewisham and Southwark to gain a deeper understanding of the consequences of losing staff, as well as any potential impacts on long-term insight and data-driven services.

Partnerships, Housing, and Resident Services

Council Tax Support Scheme Reduction:

- 3.52 Scrutiny members sought additional clarity on the reasoning behind the preferred option for reforming the scheme. Further details were also requested on the measures

being implemented to protect the most vulnerable residents and ensure that they are not disproportionately impacted by any changes. In response, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Resident Services emphasised that the council had no choice but to implement this proposal, as avoiding it would require finding £5 million in cuts elsewhere, potentially leading to the closure of libraries and other essential support services (e.g. Family Wellbeing Centres). Nonetheless, alternative support would be provided, such as through the Resident Support Fund and the new Brent Hubs model in collaboration with the New Horizon Centre, aimed at helping residents manage debt and access employment opportunities and other forms of support. Additionally, the council would carefully monitor payments and proactively reach out to residents who accumulate debt quickly to connect them with the appropriate assistance.

- 3.53 The Task Group acknowledged the cabinet member's remarks, noting that Brent's current Council Tax Support Scheme is among the most generous in London, ranking in the top four. However, due to the ongoing financial challenges, continuing the scheme in its current form is unsustainable. The group stressed the urgent need to effectively engage the VCS to help them prepare for a likely surge in inquiries should the proposal move forward. Clear and comprehensive communication was also identified as crucial to ensuring residents in genuine need are fully informed about any changes to the scheme and alternative support options, maximising their access to eligible benefits. Additionally, scrutiny members called for the withdrawal of the proposed administrative change limiting backdating of Council Tax Support to one month, expressing concerns it could unfairly disadvantage new working-age residents and increase hardship for those unable to claim in time.

Debt Recovery:

- 3.54 The Task Group raised concerns about the department's debt recovery efforts, highlighting the current collection rates for Council Tax and Business Rates. Scrutiny members questioned the planned measures to generate additional income, specifically from those who can pay but won't, as opposed to those who genuinely cannot pay. The Head of Revenue and Debt acknowledged the need for improvements, with a review underway aimed at enhancing collection rates through ethical debt collection practices. A new online portal is being introduced to streamline processes and allow staff to focus on more effective debt recovery.
- 3.55 While the Task Group noted these developments, it is strongly believed that a more substantial investment is required in debt recovery, particularly for Council Tax and Business Rates, in order to unlock significant potential for increased revenue. For example, a 4% increase in in-year Council Tax collection, returning to pre-pandemic levels, could generate an additional £7.2 million in income.

Evidence Session 2

- 3.56 This meeting was held on 2 December 2024.
- 3.57 Key participants included the Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Community Health and Wellbeing, Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Community Power, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools, Corporate Director – Community Health and Wellbeing, and Corporate Director – Children and Young People.
- 3.58 The Task Group undertook a deep dive exercise into budgetary matters within the following directorates:

- Community Health and Wellbeing
- Children and Young People

Community Health and Wellbeing

Commissioning and Procurement:

- 3.59 Given the significant financial pressures within the directorate, the Task Group questioned the department's efforts to drive efficiencies through commissioning and procurement, both within the service and across the wider council, in order to generate additional income and achieve cost savings. In response, it was mentioned that related work is currently underway, and is expected to be reported to the RPR Committee in February 2025. It was stressed that substantial strategic savings could take time to materialise.

Reablement Service:

- 3.60 Clarity was provided to the Task Group that by expanding the cohort of individuals entering reablement by including mental health and learning disability users, the outcome would be an enhanced quality of life with increased independence effectively leading to improved physical and mental wellbeing. Therefore this saving was constructive in terms of encouraging residents to remain independent (if appropriate) and reducing their reliance on long-term care services currently provided by the council.

Modernising the Adult Social Care approach to Assessment and Review:

- 3.61 The Task Group raised concerns about the accessibility implications of this proposal and asked how the council planned to mitigate the risks of people falling through the net and not receiving the assistance they needed. In response, it was explained that the council was planning to adopt a mixed model for assessments, using community-based assessments and technology for reviews. Additionally, the council is already using a risk model at the initial contact point which measured many factors, including levels of urgency.
- 3.62 Scrutiny members acknowledged the assurances given by both the cabinet member and corporate director, and mentioned that feedback on the proposal from the stakeholder session was largely positive. However, they stressed the importance of council staff leading community-based assessments alongside partners, rather than solely relying on partners to fulfil these responsibilities.

Implementation of Telecare Service Charges:

- 3.63 The Task Group raised concerns about the impact of charging for telecare services and the technology offered. In response, the Cabinet Member of Community Health and Wellbeing emphasised the importance of income generation, noting that telecare services should be part of a financial assessment if included in a care package. It was clarified that the charges, ranging from £3 to £4 per week, were for existing services and that the charge would help offset the cost of providing these services. The group were also notified that other authorities were charging up to £5 per week.

Children and Young People

Reduction in weekend use of the Gordon Brown Centre:

- 3.64 The Task Group discussed the negative consequences of reducing weekend use of the Gordon Brown Centre for care leavers. A key concern was that this change would result in longer waiting times for young people, which could significantly impact their ability to develop the confidence and skills necessary for independent living. In response, it was reported that since the proposal was put forward, £80k additional funding for the centre had since been secured from Settle and the John Lyon's Trust. Therefore, the impact of such a decision would not be as severe as initially anticipated.
- 3.65 Scrutiny members applauded the idea of securing external funding, and on a related note, proposed collaborating with other authorities to pool resources for future joint funding bids as a means of alleviating budget pressures. The Corporate Director of Children and Young People concurred and highlighted successful existing collaborations, such as the joint fostering programme with West London authorities. It was suggested that these practices be shared with other council departments to foster further collaboration and improve service delivery across the organisation.

Reduction in discretionary spend when supporting children and families:

- 3.66 While welcoming the continued use of discretionary funding to support young people in emergency situations, including transport costs, the Task Group emphasised that Brent should not be responsible for funding that is the responsibility of other agencies. Moving forward, effective scrutiny will be crucial to ensure that these funds are used effectively and collaboratively with other agencies.

Cease the Safe Base Brent offer:

- 3.67 The Task Group questioned the proposal to discontinue the Safe Base Brent offer, expressing concern that alternative support from university mental health services and organisations such as Kooth might not sufficiently address the unique needs of care leavers. For instance, the current offer includes support from an educational psychologist providing enhanced, tailored support and regular check-ins to young people in need. These concerns were acknowledged by the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools. A commitment was made to closely monitor the impact of this decision, reporting progress back to the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee at a later date.

Final Evidence Session

- 3.68 This meeting was held on 16 December 2024.
- 3.69 Key participants included the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, Chief Executive, Corporate Director - Finance and Resources, Deputy Director of Finance, and Deputy Director - Investment and Infrastructure.
- 3.70 At this meeting, the Task Group discussed and agreed the provisional recommendations that were likely to be presented to Cabinet and Full Council, based on all of the evidence heard to date.
- 3.71 For transparency purposes, it was noted that potential amendments and changes to the provisional recommendations may be made after further review and consideration

of additional evidence beyond this meeting. Any such revisions will be included in the final report.

3.72 Final recommendations can be found in section 2 of this report.

4. Other Meetings

- 4.1 Outside of the sessions detailed in section 3, the Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group met with the Independent Chair of the Audit & Standards Advisory Committee and the Chair of the Audit & Standards Committee to seek further intelligence, clarity, and assurances on the evidence provided by cabinet members/council officers as part of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group Review.
- 4.2 In addition, the Chair hosted a drop-in session for local councillors to share their thoughts and insights on the Draft Budget 2025/26.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The Task Group commends the council for its resilience in maintaining a prudent financial position amid the significant challenges of economic turmoil, ongoing austerity, financial uncertainty, and increased demand for support. Recognising the difficult choices that have been made in the Draft Budget 2025/26 to set a legally balanced budget, without significant reform to local government finance, the authority risks becoming financially unstable in the near future. This could eventually lead to the need for emergency assistance from central government – a consequence already experienced by many other local authorities.
- 5.2 The recent change in government presents a crucial opportunity to advocate for a more sustainable funding model for local authorities, essential for long-term financial health and specifically for addressing critical areas like housing and social care. This necessitates persistent lobbying efforts, such as for the adoption of place-based budgeting approaches, and increased local control over budget allocation and spending, including the flexible use of the Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL).
- 5.3 We are hopeful that, through the strategic change programme, the council will strive to minimise the impact of budget cuts on residents and partners as much as possible. By focusing on building a stronger local economy – in other words 'community wealth building' – the organisation can mitigate the impact of cuts on residents and partners by creating sustainable, long-term opportunities for growth, job creation, and financial resilience, ensuring that local communities remain empowered and economically stable even in challenging times. To achieve this, the council must think differently, embracing a new approach that harnesses Brent's strengths, re-evaluates priorities, and explores innovative solutions to address current and emerging challenges. To this end, we encourage the council to prioritise 'invest to save' initiatives, explore innovative revenue streams, and actively engage residents in co-creating solutions that address their needs and priorities, ensuring that their voices are central to shaping the future of the council.
- 5.4 Echoing previous sentiments, strengthening partnerships with the VCS is equally important for addressing the challenges ahead. As the sector plays an increasingly

vital role in service delivery—especially as the council faces continued budget cuts and relies more on the VCS to support residents—it's important to develop a collaborative strategy that ensures the continued provision of high-quality services for the benefit of residents. By working closely with the VCS, the council can leverage their expertise through joint funding bids, co-designing services, and identifying sustainable alternatives, ultimately improving service delivery and enhancing the financial resilience of both the council and the VCS.

- 5.5 The Task Group supports the Draft Budget 2025/26, subject to the outcomes of the final consultation and the acceptance of the recommendations outlined in section two of this report. This report is not the end of the budget scrutiny process and we look forward to discussing our recommendations and the budget as a whole at future meetings.

6. Participants

The Task Group would like to thank the following members for giving up their time to take part in this scrutiny process, and also to the many council officers who worked extremely hard to support and provide us with information and advice when needed:

- Councillor Muhammed Butt – Leader of the Council
- Councillor Mili Patel – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources
- Councillor Jake Rubin – Cabinet Member for Climate Action & Community Power
- Councillor Fleur Donnelly-Jackson – Cabinet Member for Housing & Resident Services
- Councillor Krupa Sheth – Cabinet Member for Public Realm & Enforcement
- Councillor Harbi Farah – Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, Jobs & Skills
- Councillor Gwen Grahl – Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools
- Councillor Neil Nerva – Cabinet Member for Community Health & Wellbeing
- Cllr Jumbo Chan – Chair, Audit & Standards Committee
- David Ewart – Independent Chair of the Audit & Standards Advisory Committee
- Kim Wright – Chief Executive
- Minesh Patel – Corporate Director, Finance & Resources
- Peter Gadsdon – Corporate Director, Partnerships, Housing & Resident Services
- Alice Lester – Corporate Director, Neighbourhoods & Regeneration
- Debra Norman – Corporate Director, Law & Governance
- Rachel Crossley – Corporate Director, Community Health & Wellbeing
- Nigel Chapman – Corporate Director, Children & Young People
- Gerry Ansell – Director, Inclusive Regeneration & Employment
- Chris Whyte – Director, Public Realm
- Tanveer Ghani – Director, Property & Assets
- Ravinder Jassar – Deputy Director of Finance
- Amanda Healy – Deputy Director, Investment & Infrastructure
- Peter Cosgrove – Head of Revenues & Debt
- Jason Sigba – Strategy Lead, Scrutiny
- Chatan Popat – Strategy Lead, Scrutiny

We would also like to express its sincere gratitude to the following valued partners and stakeholders, whose input was instrumental in ensuring a robust consideration of the 2025/26 budget proposals:

- CAB Brent
- Crisis Skylight Brent

- Brent Mencap
- Young Brent Foundation
- Jason Roberts Foundation
- Age UK Hillingdon, Harrow, and Brent
- Elders Voice
- ACE Brent

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