

# Brent Conservative Group Amendments to the Proposed Labour Budget 2025/26

*Investing in our Towns and Communities  
for a cleaner, greener, safer, fairer, and  
healthier Brent*



# Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026

## INTRODUCTION

Brent Conservative Councillors are the main opposition in Brent Council. In our role of opposition, we have held the Labour administration to account, and we aspire to do better as a borough. We too want Brent to transform as a Council and be a wonderful place to live and work.

We are not endorsing Labour's financial budget for Brent or accepting assumptions and decisions built into their budget. However, we present these amendments and some suggestions to the proposed Budget so that residents pay less taxes and get better services and value for money. Every year the Conservative Group work with Finance Officers to put forward our Amendments to deliver a balanced budget.

It is a legal requirement for Brent Council to set an annual budget and for that budget to be 'balanced' or fully funded. As far as the revenue budget is concerned, the main requirement is in the Local Government Finance Act 1992 which sets out procedures for setting the Council Tax.

Savings proposals have been put forward by officers because the managers of services have intimate knowledge of how services work and where costs might be trimmed. Officers also have the job of delivering any savings that are agreed upon.

**Inflation is** a risk that is often dealt with by contingencies, especially where inflation rates are unstable. Inflation is a pernicious budgeting problem, not just because it creates rising costs which need to be funded but also because it makes it harder to apply budget discipline. Inflation is at its highest for eight months - hitting 2.6% in November - above the Bank of England's 2% target - while the economy has shrunk for two months in a row.

The UK inflation rate under Labour is expected to rise, with some predicting it could reach 3% in 2025. Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor, may complain endlessly about inheriting the worst economic mess since the fall of the Roman Empire, or whatever her latest hyperbole is, but at least on inflation Rishi Sunak and Jeremy Hunt left behind some perfectly respectable numbers.

The Conservative Group recognises that **Reserves** provide the ultimate funding for risk. Any overspending against the budget that cannot be managed in-year will need to be met out of reserves. There is thus a trade-off between the amount of risk that is built into the budget and the amount of risk that is provided for in reserves.

Brent Council with high levels of available reserves can (literally) afford to take more risks, but it is hard to recognise that as reserves start to fall, the council may well need to take a more robust approach to the budget process, budget management and the management of risk.

The 2025-2026 local authority settlement includes:

- **Council tax referendum:** A core council tax referendum limit of up to 3% in 2025-2026
- **Funding:** A real term increase of 3.5% from 2023-2024, totalling £69 billion for councils across the country.
- **Recovery Grant:** A new emergency £600 million Recovery Grant to help councils most in need.

## **Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026**

**Brent's Core Spending Power will increase by 6.2% to £386.0m in 2025/26 (£363.5m 2024/25).**

The Council's revised General Fund revenue budget for 2024/25 is £387.5m. There is a forecast overspend of £17.4m against the revenue budget in quarter three. If sustained until the year-end, this would require a transfer from unallocated reserves. This would deplete the unallocated reserve to just £2.6m, which would require replenishing in 2025/26.

### **Body blow from the 2024 Autumn Statement!**

The Chancellor's Autumn statement delivered a body blow to the country, still recovering from the damage wreaked by the Covid pandemic. You would be hard-pressed to find many winners from Rachel Reeves' 2024 Autumn Statement which is forecast to raise taxes by £40 billion, the highest tax taken in over 30 years.

Labour's Budget of Broken Promises. They said they wouldn't adjust the figures. They have. They said they wouldn't increase borrowing. They have. They said they wouldn't raise taxes on working people, they have. The biggest hike in Modern history £40 Billion Tax Hike, £1400 hit on every household. Labour fooled the electorate claiming, 'No tax increases on working people'.

The Conservative Group notes that the Government has given a grant of Brent Council £3m for employer NI. However, The Adult and Social care budgeted by Brent will be going up from £100m to £120m. Changes to Employer National Insurance contributions announced by the Government, will more than wipe out the extra funds allocated to Brent.

The Labour Government has not done Brent any favours with inflicting Employers National Contribution increases as costs will drastically increase NI contribution for care homes. Inevitably, this will put independent care providers at risk of going bust, which could disrupt or end vital care for older and disabled service users.

Further, schools will be suffering as Government is not giving extra settlement to schools who will have to find these increases in NI contributions. No doubt same applies to Hospitals as they are the biggest employers facing higher NI increases.

The Conservative Group feels that the Government has done us the people of Brent a total unjustified injustice.

The Conservatives handed over to Labour an economy that was the fastest growing in the G7, and in just a few short months, they have managed to stall it. And now we find out that the person at the helm of this economic ship Rachel Reeves is not who she claimed to be. Instead of focusing on fixing the economic mess they've created, Labour is busy rewriting the past to cover their tracks.

It is high time we called out this for what it is. The British public is not fooled, and we will not stand idly by while Labour leads us down this ruinous path. Rachel Reeves may have tried to edit her CV, but she cannot edit the truth. The truth is that this government has proven itself incapable of delivering the prosperity and security that Britain deserves.

In the budget, Labour MPs whooped and cheered as they whacked up our taxes by an unprecedented £40 million bill. To obliterate trust this fast is a truly staggering achievement. It is the working people of this country who will pay the price.

## Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026

A figure which dwarfs the £22 billion black hole Chancellor Rachel Reeves claimed in July to justify the cruel cuts to Winter Fuel Allowance for the elderly, a figure that is now rejected by the OBR. And a figure which makes the £1.3 billion savings the policy will supposedly deliver look trivial. Spending was much higher than expected due to Covid in 2020 and 2021 and almost £10bn higher than expected in 2023 because of inflation caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Outside those years there have not been overspends close to £9.5bn.

The Chancellor has ramped up spending on vanity projects and pay increases for her trade union allies. Whilst cruelly withdrawing vital payments for millions of pensioners who will have to choose between heating and eating this winter.

Residents at the doorstep in Brent have told us they feel betrayed because Sir Keir Starmer says one thing and does another. But I know all politicians do that, I thought Labour would be different and they are not.

And we really and truly think Labour are attacking everybody who's worked all their life and saved money. Sir Keir Starmer and the Labour Party are trying to attack us all for saving money and they are not looking after the people who need it.

We know some older people in Brent are having sleepless nights because of their anxiety about how they will afford their heating bills. The OBR have comprehensively \*rejected\* the £22bn 'black hole' figure. Chancellor Rachel Reeves & Sir Keir Starmer should admit this was not true, and that using it to justify taking the winter fuel payment allowance from millions of pensioners in poverty was wrong.

Thanks to their Budget, we are all getting poorer: Per person, per family, per small business, per community. The party's pledges not to raise taxes on 'working people' helped it win power.

Labour have failed working people with this Budget, they came into office promising change, growth and no tax rises on working people. What we have instead is the same old Labour: higher taxes, more borrowing and lower growth. This Budget hurts hard-working British people.

It's increasingly clear, however, that the Government defines 'working people' only as trade union members and the public sector. Everyone else should prepare to have their pockets picked to boost public services. Cabinet Ministers received hundreds of thousands of pounds from trade unions before capitulating to pay deals with public sector workers. Sir Keir Starmer's inner circle accepted £480,030 in cash and donations in kind from Labour's trade union backers since 2019.

The donations came before Chancellor Rachel Reeves agreed to inflation-busting pay rises for millions of public sector workers. Teachers and nurses look set to pocket a 5.5 per cent pay increase, while prison service workers and senior NHS managers can expect to see salaries soar by five per cent. Train drivers have also been offered a huge hike of 14 per cent over three years.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves ultimately decides whether to give the go-ahead to the rises after deals are drawn up by independent pay boards. Health Secretary Wes Streeting received £14,286 in support from unions in the past five years. Unison contributed £3,143 to cover the costs of printing campaign leaflets.

Rising Gilt Yields UK and global government bonds experienced a significant selloff in the first half of January 2025, driving yields materially higher and increasing borrowing costs for the UK government.


## Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026


The 30-year gilt yields surged to its highest level since 1998, while the 10-year yield has climbed to levels not seen since the 2008 global financial crisis.


**In Global Market Rout, Britain Is the 'Weakest Link'** Investors are demanding sharply higher yields on government bonds, threatening to upend the Labour Party's plans to reinvigorate a stagnant British economy.


What lies ahead for UK taxpayers - Household disposable income, or living standards, will be the worst under any Labour government since 1955 when inflation is factored in. Pay will stagnate in the middle of the parliament as higher inflation lessens pay rises and growth is slowed in an already challenging economic environment


Prices will rise more because of the budget and growth will be weaker in part due to the rise in employer's national insurance. Inflation will rise because of employers passing on the national insurance contributions to customers, the introduction of VAT on private school fees and the reform of vehicle tax, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) said.


 **National insurance. Up.** The rate of employer Class 1 NICs increased from 13.8% to 15%. This change comes into effect on April 6, 2025. Businesses are finding that an employers' National Insurance rise is making hiring staff and creating jobs harder and ultimately the government's main goal of growth is hindered.

 **Capital gains tax. Up.** Changes to CGT rates effective from Budget Day (30 October 2024) The lower rate of CGT (for basic rate taxpayers) will rise from 10% to 18% and the higher rate of CGT (for higher rate taxpayers) will rise from 20% to 24%. This is hurting businesses' abilities to expand and hire.

 **Inheritance tax. Up.** From April 2026, tax will be payable for the first time on inherited agricultural assets worth more than £1m. Under the current rules, small family farms - including land used for crops or rearing animals, as well as farm buildings, cottages and houses - have been handed down through the generations without the need to pay inheritance tax.

 **Energy taxes. Up.** To ensure oil and gas companies contribute more to make the UK a clean energy superpower, the government confirmed an increase in the EPL taking effect from 1 November 2024, raising it from 35% to 38%. Doing so brings the headline rate of tax to 78%. Whether the funding from the additional 3 per cent levy will help to drive the UK's clean energy transition remains questionable.

 **Business rates. Up.** 219,410 shops, pubs, restaurants, offices, factories as well as public sector buildings in England will now face a business rates tax hike of £1.66 billion on the 1st of April for the 2024/25 financial year. Firms in England will now be paying £7.4 billion a year more in business rates than in 2010 – a 6.7% increase"

 **Stamp duty. Up** Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) rates are changing from 1st April 2025, which will add thousands to your home move. These stamp duty changes are likely to have the most impact on first-time buyers. Reducing the nil rate threshold by £125,000 and reducing the maximum purchase price for which first-time buyers' relief can be claimed by the same amount, it could make it even harder for some first-time buyers to get onto the property ladder.

## **Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026**

It hasn't even been a few months since Labour stormed into Downing Street, but their shiny promises are crumbling faster than a bargain gadget from Temu. If Sir Keir Starmer's crew had come clean in July, would voters have handed them the keys to No.10? Unlikely.

**Labour said they would freeze energy bills** As we enter another cold and difficult winter, many people simply can't afford to see their heating bills go up yet again. The disastrous government cuts to the Winter Fuel Payment coupled with this energy price rise will be a hammer blow for millions of vulnerable pensioners this winter. Changes to the winter fuel payment mean more than 10 million pensioners are not receiving the money this winter.

**Labour said they would protect pensioners** of all the groups in society, apart from children in poverty that is, who does Rachel Reeves also decide should stay in the situation they're in, pensioners were surely the last people that she should have picked on when it came to punishing someone for the state of the UK's finances, if any such punishment was necessary. And I wonder whether it was. But she chose to pick on pensioners.

**Labour said they would back WASPI women's fight** While seeking power, Sir Keir Starmer publicly backed 1950s WASPI women's fight for "fair and fast compensation" after the state pension age for women was hiked by five years. He dropped them like a stone. As did every other cabinet minister who took the WASPI pledge: Rachel Reeves, Liz Kendall and Angela Rayner.

**Labour said they would back farmers** In 2023, Sir Keir Starmer promised a new relationship and "certainty". Instead, he has walloped them with inheritance tax (IHT), bringing families a lifetime of uncertainty.

**More bad news for our residents and businesses in Brent, news which the Labour Administration will shrug off, but the 2024 Autumn Statement marked a major milestone.**

This Conservative group budget amendment puts forward an alternative which invests in our towns, protects our beautiful greenbelt for future generations and delivers on the priorities of residents, ending a culture of waste at the Civic Centre.

The Conservative Group believes the Government must provide adequate funding to sustain the vital services that our communities in Brent rely on daily. We are clear that there needs to be immediate action to support the sector in the short term. In particular, the Government should give councils, a significant and sustained increase in overall funding that reflects current and future demands for services, multi-year and timely finance settlements in general rather than ring-fenced grant funding, reduce the fragmentation of government funding and end the use of competitive bidding to allocate grant funding.

The Conservative Group has identified that within the budget report, the schedule of reserves in Appendix J shows £10 million of Public Health reserves that is currently unspent. This £10million is part of the £26million given to Brent Council by Government. It is scandalous that Brent is sitting on this money instead of spending and improving the lives of Brent Residents. We have allocated and are proposing in our Conservative Amended budget to spend this unspent £10 million on public health given that these reserves are ring fenced for health initiatives.

# Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026

## Council Tax

The Conservative Group is proposing a Council tax increase of 3.99% of which 2% for Adult Social Care will be ringfenced. This will mean a Council tax rate increase on Band D properties for 2025/26 of £1,627.11 compared to £1,642.77 at 4.99%. The Brent Labour administration is again proposing a Council Tax increase of 4.99% (consisting of a 2.99% general increase plus 2% for the Adult Social Care Precept), making a Band D Council Tax of £1,642.77 (for the Brent element).

The collectable amount for Council Tax in 2024/25 is currently £217.295m and the projected collection for this year by 31 March 2025 is £198.376m or 91.29%. £6.7m is outstanding from 2023-24. Across all lines of debt, the current debt liability is £242m (Council Tax, Housing Benefit overpayments, rents, parking, adult social care).

Sadiq Khan's precept increase of around 4% for his element of the Council tax, will mean even bigger bills for Brent residents and paying in tax more once again. The Labour Administration over the years has taxed and taxed residents. The Mayor of London Sadiq Khan has no regard for hard-working Londoners and will raise his council tax precept by nearly 4%. This means he has raised his precept by a whopping **80%** since 2016. This year it equates to over **£490** at Band D.

### Single Person Council Tax Discount

The current number of SPDs as of December 2024 was 37,221 and costs the Council £18.5m. Concerns about any individual awards should be raised as a member enquiry in the usual way and it will be investigated promptly. The council holds this data to administer council tax and carries out regular reviews, but Finance is not able to share data at that level with councillors.

The Conservative Group notes once again that Brent Council seriously needs to look at the single person's discount as scrutiny has highlighted the abuse of the system. Fraudulent claims are made, and recent internal audits found that fraudsters are misrepresenting their household composition to Brent Council or failing to inform the council when their circumstances change. This income recovery would be a substantial saving to Brent Council's revenue. We recognise that most residents claiming the Single Person Discount are doing so legitimately but council investigators need to do more to root out those who wrongly reckon they can cheat the system and get away with it.

The fact is a person aged 18 or over living in a property may be entitled to a single-person discount and qualifies the person to **25%** off their Council Tax bill. Brent has a NEC Software solution in place but is not utilised fully. We would like the Benefits Team to look at overpayments and work with Finance to undertake more reconciliations and robust checks. These variances result in housing benefits overpayment discrepancies, which results in huge resident Council Tax. We can ill afford to have a lack of control within the Housing Benefit Team and Finance Team where discrepancies have been found. The Council cannot go to Brent residents year after year to ask them to pay more in local taxes.

The Conservative Group wants the Brent Labour Administration to get a grip on the mismanagement of Council Tax, Benefits and Housing Benefits. This has to stop. There is a cost-of-living crisis which is being exacerbated by these enormous Council Tax hikes. The Labour Administration is asking residents to give, give, give. Enough is enough!

# **Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026**

## **Business Rates 2025/2026**

Relief for retail, hospitality and leisure sectors has been extended, but with the discount reduced from 75% to 40%. Many businesses in England are set to see their rates bills nearly double in 2025/26. The council keeps 30% of the amount payable, £43m, and pays the remainder to the central government 33%, and the Greater London Authority 37%. Overall, income from business rates (including top-up grants and funding for reliefs) is expected to be £126million.

To revive our high streets and help local businesses get back on their feet, we once again propose a 1-hour free parking (on-street and off-street) throughout the borough. This will allow residents to park and shop, and go to banks, or Post Offices for longer, helping support small businesses and increased passing footfall. Even more important, as many businesses are cutting jobs ahead of this Labour Government's tax changes, our high streets will need to generate higher income to support the shops to stay afloat.

Our Neighbouring Conservative-run Harrow Council recently introduced 1-hour free parking in all car parks across Harrow. This has been warmly welcomed by residents and businesses, who have seen an uptake in usage. It is estimated that this would cost Brent £1m in terms of a reduction to current budgeted income and will be funded by re-allocating the New Homes Bonus Grant from Capital to Revenue, which is allowed under the current grant conditions.

## **Changes to Council Tax Support**

Brent has created one of the most generous Council Tax Support Schemes in London. We are glad the administration has acknowledged that this scheme is no longer affordable or sustainable given the huge financial pressures the local authority is facing and for the first time is proposing to charge 35% for Single Persons Allowance to working age households.

Like many local authorities, Brent is facing an extremely challenging financial situation. With £16m saved in 2025/26 to balance the budget. The proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme will bring Brent more in line with other boroughs while ensuring that resources are focused on those who need them most. This will help achieve around £5m in net savings.

The proposed changes will only affect working-age households receiving Council Tax Support from April 2025. Pensioners are exempt and will continue to be assessed under the existing system, which can cover up to 100% of their Council Tax bill.

The Brent Conservative group believes that Brent had created one of the most generous Council Tax Support Schemes in London. The proposed changes will only affect working-age households receiving Council Tax Support from April 2025. Pensioners are exempt and will continue to be assessed under the existing system, which can cover up to 100% of their Council Tax bill.

The Conservative Group proposes that we raise the proposed 35% Single Persons Discount to 40% and save an additional £1m which could be spent to support those pensioners who just missed out and are losing the Winter Fuel Allowance.

## **Tourist Tax:**

The Conservative group wants this Brent Council to tell the London Mayor Sadiq Khan not to consider a "Tourist Tax" for London. The Hospitality sector is warning that it would be extremely damaging for London businesses and Brent would be adversely negatively affected as we have such a high volume of hospitality hotels and businesses. With the iconic Wembley Stadium on our doorstep and receiving huge number of tourists filling up our hotels and they are helping the local



## **Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026**

economy, this is the right way forward, tell the London Mayor to dump the Tourist tax thinking.

### **Housing:**

There are currently 1049 households in Bed & Breakfast accommodation. The average nightly cost to the council including the amount received in housing benefit subsidy is £39.40 per night. This is a 2011 figure which has not been increased but the cost of Temporary Accommodation currently is approximately £15m.

Over 150 families per week are presenting at the Civic Centre as homeless and with over 34,000 households registered on the housing wait list, a further £15m overspend is projected on Temporary Accommodation. We believe over 900 people are living in hotels in Brent. The Council must do more to discourage new people seeing Brent as a “soft touch” resulting in Brent having to house these newcomers presenting themselves as homeless into expensive Temporary Accommodation.

Housing fraud includes, not telling the truth when applying for a property - for example claiming to have children when they do not, sub-letting a property without permission, and living in a property after someone has died without the right to do so. Brent councils to do more checks for housing fraud, for example, a tenant’s housing record against other records such as Housing Benefit or the Electoral Roll that the genuine tenant lives at the property verified by the tenant’s passport and tenancy agreement.

### **Homelessness Prevention:**

Measures announced by the Chancellor of a £233m uplift for the sector for homelessness prevention in 2025/26. The Chancellor’s confirmation of an extension to the Household Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments will provide local authorities with a further £1bn in vital welfare support. The Homelessness prevention grant in 2025/26 is £14.2m, an increase of £3.5m from 2024/25.

Currently, the subsidy has been frozen at 2011 rates – even though Temporary Accommodation has become significantly more expensive over the past 13 years. The ‘subsidy gap’ is a priority concern for London boroughs, especially as they increasingly rely on relatively high-cost temporary accommodation options in B&Bs and commercial hotels. Lifting the cap would better reimburse boroughs for their spiralling temporary accommodation costs. For example: for every £100.00 cost, Brent can only claim £30.00 from DWP.

### **Discretionary Housing Payments:**

The Chancellor’s confirmation of an extension to the Household Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments, which will provide local authorities with a further £1bn in vital welfare support. The allocations for Brent are currently unknown and are expected to be announced in early February 2025.

The Conservative Group wants the Labour administration to make sure the person requiring the support provides as much information as possible: This includes details of their income, spending, debts, and any other relevant circumstances. Also providing bank statements. Explaining why they need help. This could include details of any changes in their circumstances, disabilities or illnesses, or the cause of your problem and seek evidence to show what the person has done to help themselves: This could include any action taken to try to renegotiate rent with their landlord.

**The council is currently spending approximately £36m a year on around 2000 residents in homeless need and accommodation. A large amount for a small percentage of residents.**

## Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026

The 2021 Census provides an estimate of the number of unoccupied homes in Brent as of March 2021 (7.4% of dwellings - 9,425 in number). **The census figure is more than three times higher than the administrative count of empty homes sourced from the Council Tax Base.** In Brent as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023 recorded shows 3135 empty properties, which is three times less than on the 2021 census. There have been **1604** properties empty for under 2 years, **219** properties between 2-5 years at 100% premium, **47** properties have been emptied between 5-10 years at 200% premium and no properties empty for more than 10 years.

The Conservative Group notes that if Brent Council is working to its full potential, our Council Tax should not have to be increased. Long-term empty property criteria give rise to additional Council Tax. For example, a property that has been empty for 2 to 4 years is liable to pay 200% (twice) of the Council Tax, for properties that are empty for 5 years the council tax is 300%, properties that are empty for 10 years or more should pay 400%.

The Conservatives group is concerned that of the 1604 empty properties of less than 2 years, Brent Council should have collected approximately £3.2 million (average council tax per property of £2000). However, our concern is that the total collected for 2023/24 is £1.5 million. There is a big discrepancy in empty properties as per the National Census 9000+ in Brent and Brent Council's records show only 3000+ as vacant. Another reason to be more robust to collect the additional £1.7m to put towards lower council tax increases or the Conservative proposal for 1-hour free parking on our high streets.

### **New Home Bonus Scheme:**

The Conservative group is aware of the New Homes Bonus, a non-ringfenced grant, can be spent on either revenue or capital, strategic projects, or placed in a local authority's reserves. There is no time limit on when the funds can be spent and local authorities are free to decide how to spend it, as they are in the best position to make decisions about local priorities. However, the Government expects local authorities to engage with the communities most affected by housing growth to decide how the money is spent, so residents can share in the benefits of growth.

The council will receive a £1.9m New Homes Bonus grant for 2025/26. The Labour Group has allocated this grant to finance the capital programme, we propose to move this into the revenue budget for 2025/26. The government has stated its intention in the provisional local government finance settlement for 2025/26 to be the final year of the New Homes Bonus in its current form. Therefore, if this is to be used in the revenue budget for 2025/26, an alternative funding source will need to be found from 2026/27, such as the efficiencies mentioned above.

### **Tackling Flytipping in our Borough:**

One of our Conservative councillors was at a Scrutiny meeting and Officers mentioned that there is no evidence of increased fly-tipping, but our perception is that there is a lot of fly-tipping across all wards. Brent Council have been named on London Evening news on television that Brent is one of the worst London boroughs for fly-tipping. There is no need to increase the bulky waste collection charge from £40 to £55.

We believe that Brent has seen a dramatic increase in fly-tipping as in previous years. We need to break the business model of fly-tippers and stop the Council from being merely a 'click and collect' service. As part of our commitment to helping reduce and tackle the issue, we believe we need to tackle the problem with more preventative measures, enforcement, and the use of technology with miniature cameras hidden in specific locations across Brent as part of a crackdown on fly-tipping. The Conservative Group will work with department heads to target these resources effectively and

## **Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026**

efficiently to help deliver the best results with data and patterns where hotspots are prevalent.

The Conservative Group propose bringing back the free bulky waste collection scheme which has been suggested by many residents to discourage unscrupulous people from fly-tipping and dumping bulky items on our streets. It is not right that Brent residents pay one of the highest Council Tax in London only to be charged again to have their waste collected.

### **NCIL - CIL**

The Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL), the community funding programme using money collected from developers, has £15.7m currently available, of which £2.9m has been allocated and £12.8m is unallocated. Of the amount allocated, this will fund projects such as improving local facilities like libraries, community centres, sports halls, greening the borough, promoting health and wellbeing, supporting environmental sustainability, supporting sustainable transport, supporting community safety, and empowering young people to encourage youth representation.

The Conservative group are proposing part of the NCIL money be used for Community Safety such as CCTV, proactive Enforcement Officers to prevent knife crime, serious youth violence and school exclusions by engaging, educating, and empowering disadvantaged young people and supporting them to enjoy their lives and improve their prospects.

The Conservative group's view is that NCIL should also be used to ameliorate infrastructure, including pavements and roads around the new developments and that will relieve the pressure on the revenue budget. This is a political decision to make and steps taken to take this forward.

**CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy)** – We propose that the charge on new developments that councils and the Mayor of London collect to fund infrastructure projects should be utilised for NCIL projects and a portion of the CIL be set aside for community-led projects. This is the right course of action to take as the work led by local communities is so important and the council should do more to support Brent community groups.

### **Invest in Shared Services and Cutting Waste at the Civic Centre:**

The Conservative Group continues to urge Brent Council to recognise the importance of Shared Services to generate savings as proven by the partnership of Westminster City Council with Kensington & Chelsea. This arrangement has reduced the cost of the Council by £50m. Also, the London Boroughs of Wandsworth and Richmond's sharing arrangement generates an annual savings of £10 million.

Brent Conservatives propose a shared services arrangement with both our Legal Services and a back-office arrangement with Harrow Council and/or Barnet Council. Additionally, in making more savings we want Shared Services in waste disposal so that Brent residents can use Harrow waste sites to reduce carbon footprints of car journeys and reduce pollution. We want Brent Council to note that this is an area where we are sure savings can be made, and the additional facilities are welcomed by residents who have begged us to investigate this shared initiative.

### **Care, Health & Wellbeing (CHW) – Adult Social Care:**

**The Conservative Group acknowledges that the demands on Adult Social Care and also our young people services keep increasing in recent years and that the budget for this sector is huge, £122+ million.**

## **Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026**

We are not proposing any further savings be made in this area, but The Conservative Group's view is that there is scope to identify efficiencies and serve the residents better, particularly with regards to agency staff and care agencies, investing in full-time staff. However, to avoid dipping into our reserves, further savings in 2025/26 should be explored and made.

We recognise that this service should continue to provide the best possible care for our residents and to remain in their own homes. Additionally, unpaid carers like family members, friends, neighbours, or other relatives should be supported much more. We all know that without this unpaid care, more residents would need residential or nursing homes at huge costs for the Council.

### **Children & Young People (CYP):**

The committee oversees the duties of the council and its partners duties in respect to looking after children and care leavers to ensure the duties are fulfilled. It also seeks to improve the life chances of looked after children and care leavers in Brent.

In December 2024, the Government announced £740 million of capital investment in 2025-26, to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or who require alternative provision (AP). This is alongside the previously announced additional high-needs revenue funding, which will increase by almost £1 billion in 2025-26, compared to 2024-25.

Brent Council received £90.3m funding for the High Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant which covers grant funding for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Overall, compared to the funding assumptions in the draft budget there is £19.4m of additional grant funding, of which £8.4m is ring-fenced and £11m (social care grant and recovery grant) that can be used to fund specific pressures.

As of August 2024, there were 295 Looked After Children (LAC) in Brent. The current average weekly cost for a residential placement in 2024/25 was £6,492. Additionally, there are typically two clients in secure accommodation throughout the year, with an expected annual cost of £1m. The average weekly costs of the top six residential placements involving complex needs currently range between £7,000 and £13,500.

The Conservative Group fails to see the logic of making a saving when we are already overspending, in fact, we should be putting money into our children's services to support our young people. However, we feel that this department needs to robustly assess the ability to provide better service and support parents' capacity and resources to improve their children's outcomes at the initial stages within the budget.

### **Partnerships, Housing & Resident Services (PH&RS):**

#### **Brent Magazine**

Let's go 'digital only' for the Brent Magazine "Civic Centre Pravda" the magazine published by Brent Council. The printed version distributed to each Brent household should be stopped by the Labour administration due to budget constraints and continue its online version only. The magazine is manifestly unfair because it offers cut-price local news with adverts which should cover the design costs and have some change. Further, it is noted that the magazine is mixed in with Brent Labour run council propoganda that pours taxpayers' money down the drain.

## **Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026**

The cost for printing and delivering each edition of the magazine is around £42,000 so the total annual gross cost is around £168,000. Some of this cost is offset by the income generated from advertising in the magazine, although we have more work to do with colleagues in finance to be able to provide the exact figure for income as this is currently showing in the wider income target within conferences & events.

The current forecast for income from the magazine is circa £15k-£20k. The staffing costs are absorbed within the corporate communications team who routinely write articles and takes photos as part of our normal communications and campaign work with many of these pieces appearing in the magazine as well as other channels such as social media, e-newsletters, the council website and being sent to local journalists etc. Better utilisation of staff would result in taking on work within departments where there is staff capacity resulting in efficiencies and productivity.

### **Neighbourhood & Regeneration (N&R)**

It is a well-known fact that Brent is one of the London boroughs where there is an enormous increase in fly-tipping. Labour's budget proposal puts further financial burden on hard working Brent residents by increasing the charge for bulky waste collection from £40 to £55. This will mean more fly-tipping and extra cost to council tax rate payers.

The Conservative proposes a smarter and wider use of technology using re-deployable low-cost fly-tipping CCTV cameras, which don't require new physical infrastructure, wiring or lighting to be put in place (which comes at great cost, and results in a very overt camera placement). The cameras are presently used only on a rotational basis at known fly-tipping locations to catch unsuspecting offenders.

#### **Landlords Incentives:**

The Conservative Group proposes to remove the Landlords Incentive Scheme. In the Labour draft budget, Brent Labour is giving generous grants of £1+ million as an incentive to Landlords to bring their properties back into use to rent out in 2025/26.

The Conservative Group feels that it is wrong to subsidise private landlords in this way as it acts as an incentive to keep rents artificially high. They should be sourcing finance from other sources to renovate their properties to rent out.

If the property remains empty the landlord will be liable for high Council Tax which benefits the council either way. It is therefore the Conservative Group's proposal to scrap the scheme. If the landlord cannot conduct improvements and put the property to rent, he can sell it and create an opportunity for new house hunters to climb the ladder.

Long-term empty property premiums - A premium of the relevant band charge is applied depending on how long the property has been empty. For 2024/25 this will result in an additional levy depending on how long the applicable vacant dwelling has been empty:

- 1 or more years, but less than 5 years, a levy of 100%, (i.e. a charge of 200%)
- 5 or more years, but less than 10 years, a levy of 200%, (i.e. a charge of 300%)
- 10 or more years, a levy of 300% (i.e. a charge of 400%)

## **Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026**

### **Selective Licensing Scheme came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2024**

The council implemented the policy whereby all landlords require a costly license from £640 per house. Since the implementation of the scheme, circa £10m has been collected from Landlords. There are an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 number of outstanding license fees to be yet collected from Landlords.

**There is an eye-watering £12,800,000 that still needs to be collected because Brent Council has failed to implement this policy robustly across Brent except of Wembley Hill which has been left out of the policy. The Conservative Group wants Brent Council to urgently collect these outstanding fees from Landlords thereby generating extra income towards our budget, and especially to allow Brent council not to increase the higher council tax but the lower 3.99% as proposed by the Conservative Amended budget.**

Brent Council should do more and tell landlords that if they do not get a licence, they could get an unlimited fine upon prosecution and a criminal record or receive a civil penalty of up to £30,000 per offence and may be banned from running a rental property.

### **Potholes and broken pavements**

Many of the Borough's roads are not in a fit and proper state due to years of neglect. We want to invest in them to help reduce potholes, improve safety and help make sure that our roads are fit for the future. Residents deserve better, safer roads and footways.

The Autumn 2024 Budget announced nearly £1.6 billion in capital funding for local highways maintenance in England for the financial year 2025 to 2026. This includes £500 million of additional funding when compared to funding levels for 2024 to 2025. Highways maintenance allocations for Brent 2025/2026 incentive is £759,000.

In the Labour draft budget, the allocation for Reactive Maintenance covers all highway assets including lines, signs, street furniture, footways and carriageways and is merely £0.8m. The Conservative Group proposes to increase this to £1.1 million. This additional amount will be funded by use of the New Homes Bonus grant.

### **Street Works**

The Conservative Group wants utility companies to be **handed heavy fines for carrying out sub-standard road repairs where they fail to meet strict standards ensuring their work meets rigorous Brent Council criteria.** Residents and motorists should have a reasonable expectation that the roads they are travelling on are well-maintained and free of defects and holes

## **Law and Governance (LG)**

We propose that an additional two Lead Member posts should be amalgamated i.e. Resident Support and Culture with Public Safety and Partnership. **This would save £50K per annum.**

## **Finance & Resources (FR)**

General Fund Reserves 2025 - The Brent Labour Administration draft budget proposes to increase the General Fund reserve by £1m to £20 million for 2025/26. Brent Conservative Group proposes NOT to do this and instead transfer this one-off increase to support the 2024/25 revenue budget.

# **Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026**

## **Making Brent Cleaner and Greener**

### **Blue Sack Cardboard recycling**

In October 2023 Brent introduced the Blue Bag Recycling scheme. This is still not working!

Many blue bags have blown away, torn or stolen; residents have taken to dumping large cardboard boxes on the pavements as Veolia won't collect the cardboard placed in the blue recycling bins. Councillors are facing backlashes over this disastrous recycling plan. Opposition to Brent Council's blue sack recycling scheme keeps growing as frustrated residents call this reduced fortnightly collection a "waste of money" and claim it makes it more difficult to recycle.

The Conservative Group is proposing to reverse the blue sack cardboard recycling as it has been an ill-thought scheme that sees blue bags flying onto the roads and pavements and revert back to recycling in the blue bins. The idea that the cardboard does not get wet with the lid closed is a myth and in practice does not work. It is estimated that this is most likely to lead to a loss of income from recycling by £1m. We propose to fund this shortfall by using the New Homes Bonus grant.

## **Public Health**

The Conservative Group has identified that within the budget report, the schedule of reserves in Appendix J shows £10m of Public Health reserves that is currently unspent. Given that these reserves are ring fenced for public health initiatives, we propose to invest in preventative measures and more outdoor gyms, Multi-User Game Areas and working through the Brent Community Health Matters identify communities that need more help to tackle health issues like obesity, diabetes, early diagnosis of neurological conditions and provide more fitness opportunities.

## **Making Brent a Safer Borough**

The Conservative Group believe the Council needs to do more to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour across the borough to keep our streets safe by installing mobile CCTV cameras in crime hotspots across the borough.

We note that Sadiq Khan has once again increased his Precept and yet knife crime and violent attacks, especially on women, have increased. Under Sadiq Khan's London, we see Robbery up 49%, Sexual Offences up 53% and Thefts up 21%.

Keeping us safe is London Mayor Sadiq Khan's responsibility. Our message to him is to 'wake up' and show political leadership over soaring crime in London once known as one of the world's safest cities. Sir Khan needs to stop blaming everyone else. Help make Brent a safer borough.

### **Increase in Knife Crime Incidents**

Unfortunately, knife-related incidents have escalated across Brent in comparison to previous reporting periods. As a Council, we need to do much more to understand what is driving the increase, address this issue and reduce offences in the borough. Local Police in conjunction with Brent Council's Communities and Safer Neighbourhoods should conduct more targeted knife crime awareness sessions with schools and parents in the new fiscal year.

### **Increase in drug dealing Incidents**

The Conservative group believes that when a community begins to be neglected, it undoubtedly attracts more anti-social behaviours. There has been an increase in drug dealing and knife incidents

## Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026

in Brent, and the Metropolitan Police needs to do more to take action to address the issue. The Safer Brent Community Safety Strategy needs to include more frequent on-street enforcement in hotspot areas. The Metropolitan Police and council need to conduct more joint operations to reduce drug dealing in areas like Queensbury Station Parade and Harlesden.

### The Conservative Group's Funding Proposal 2025/26

<b>Conservative Group - Alternative budget proposals</b>	<b>Impact on 2025/26 budget £m</b>
1 Hour free parking on high streets (loss of income)	0.9
Removal of landlord incentives (saving)	(1.1)
Amalgamated Lead member post (saving)	(0.05)
Clampdown on Brent Magazine (saving)	(0.25)
Increase budget for potholes and pavement repairs	0.3
Remove blue sack cardboard recycling (loss of income)	1.0
Additional spend on Public Health initiatives such as outdoor gyms	1.0
Top slice of New Homes Bonus to fund additional borrowing for the capital programme	0.2
Re-allocate NHB grant from capital to revenue	(1.7)
Increase Council Tax by 3.99% (loss of income) instead of 4.99%	1.7
Utilise unspent Public Health reserves	(1.0)
Maintain the current reserve level at £19m	(1.0)
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.0</b>

We commend these Conservative Group amendments to the Labour's proposed budget. The Conservative Councillors would like to thank Minesh Patel, Rav Jassar and other finance officers for assisting the group in preparing this budget amendment.

**Cllr Suresh Kansagra,**  
**Leader - Brent Conservative Group**



# **Brent Conservatives Amendments to the Council Budget 2025/2026**

## **Advice from the Corporate & Director of Finance & Resources**

Senior finance support has been provided to assist the Conservative Group to formulate an alternative budget that reflects their policy priorities.

The Alternative Budget proposed by the Conservative Group would be a legal, balanced budget for 2025/26, although it is recognised that this carries financial risk. The potential implications for 2026/27 and beyond have not been considered as part of these proposals.

Overall these proposals introduce £1.3m of new spending commitments (potholes and public health services), £1.4m of new savings (removing landlord incentives, removing a Cabinet member and discontinuing the Brent magazine) and £3.6m of revenue foregone from increasing council tax by 3.99% (1% below the maximum amount allowable), one hour free parking on high streets and removal of blue sacks. This is balanced by £2m of one off reserves and re-allocating the New Homes Bonus grant from the capital programme to the revenue budget.

Firstly, these proposals are heavily dependent on the New Homes Bonus (NHB) grant. The Council will receive £1.9m in 2025/26. This is a non-ring-fenced grant that is currently recorded as a reserve and used to finance the capital programme. Allocating a proportion of the grant into the Council's revenue budget is allowed under the current grant conditions, however this would have an impact on the financing of the capital programme. In addition, this grant is highly unpredictable and is one of the reasons why this grant has historically not been budgeted for in the revenue budget. There is therefore a risk of building this volatile grant (which has been subject to government top slicing and various rule changes over the years) into the base budget and calls into question the sustainability of the proposals set out in this report that are to be funded by this grant. The government has also indicated that 2025/26 will be the final year of this grant.

Finally, section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires that I, as Corporate Director of Finance and Resources, report to Council my view of the adequacy of reserves and the robustness of the estimates underpinning the budget. This assessment is set out in more detail in section 6 of the budget report. In summary, the General Fund reserve is held to cover uncertain events that may transpire, such as an unexpected overspend or to cover bumps in cash flow. The level is subjective and requires professional judgement, however it is generally accepted that 5% of net expenditure should be held as a generally useable reserve. When setting the budget for 2025/26 it was deemed necessary to increase the General Fund reserve by £1m in order for this reserve to keep within 5% of the Council's net budget. In addition, our external auditors would be critical of deviating away from the current strategy and comment negatively in their annual value for money report.

The proposal to not increase the General Fund reserve by £1m would result in a balance of 4.6% of net expenditure. On balance, this is not a significant deviation from the current strategy, but it is not a medium to long term position that can be maintained. Despite the financial pressures facing the Council, the level of external scrutiny on Councils to demonstrate financial resilience and sustainability is expected to increase. Therefore, this proposal needs to be included a commitment that the 5% level of General Fund reserves is maintained from 2026/27. Overall, this proposal adds risk to the 2025/26 budget but is not unlawful.

**Minesh Patel**  
**Corporate Director of Finance & Resources**