

**MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES AND PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on 28 January 2025 at 6.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Conneely (Chair), Councillor Kennelly (Vice-Chair) and Councillors, S Butt, Dixon, Fraser, Long, Molloy, and Shah.

**1. Apologies for Absence and Clarification of Alternate Members**

Councillor Conneely (as Chair) welcomed members of the Scrutiny Committee to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Maurice, Councillor Mitchell, and Councillor Ahmadi Moghaddam (with Councillor Fraser attending as a substitute).

**2. Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest made during the meeting.

**3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting held on Tuesday 5 November 2024 be approved as a correct record.

**4. Matters Arising (If Any)**

There were no matters arising raised at the meeting.

**5. Deputations (If Any)**

No deputations were raised at the meeting.

**6. Order of Business**

The Chair agreed to vary the order of business on the agenda to enable the Scrutiny Progress Update - Recommendations Tracker (Agenda Item 9) and Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2024-25 (Agenda Item 10) to be considered as the first main items of business on the agenda. The minutes therefore reflect the order in which the items were dealt with at the meeting.

**7. Scrutiny Progress Update - Recommendations Tracker**

The Chair advised that, as discussed with the Committee, there were a number of recommendations that had previously been made in relation to supported exempt accommodation. Subsequent to further departmental discussions, there recommendation had been subject to further review with Laurence Coaker (Director Housing Needs and Support) having agreed to attend a future meeting in order to present an update regarding the recommendations and issues which had been raised by the Committee.

Members took the opportunity to thank Gerry Ansell (Director Inclusive Regeneration and Employment) for the response provided regarding the Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) and section 106 overview. It was noted that a new report would be forthcoming to address the incorporation of resident and councillor feedback, as per the Committee's request with members keen to ensure this was presented to the Committee for input prior to final approval.

With no further issues raised the Committee noted the Scrutiny Recommendations Tracker report and update on key actions and information requests identified.

## **8. Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2024-25**

The Committee received a report from the Deputy Director Democratic Services, which presented the 2024-25 work programme for the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee.

In considering the report, members were advised that the work programme had been developed to reflect a number of key changes, including modifications to Cabinet Members and their titles. It was noted that the 'Employment and Skills' item would be considered at the February 2025 meeting. It was further noted that 'Build Quality', which had been a significant concern to the Committee now fell within the remit of Councillor Krupa Sheth as Cabinet member for Environment and Enforcement.

Having reviewed the proposed work programmed it was **RESOLVED** to approve the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee work programme (as updated) for the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

## **9. Safer Brent Partnership Annual Report 2024**

Councillor Harbi Farah (Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, Jobs and Skills) was invited to introduce a report providing an overview of the Safer Brent Partnership Annual Report 2024. In presenting the report, members were advised that the information provided detailed the key activities, achievements and challenges of the Safer Brent Partnership over the past year. Early last year, a Community Safety Strategy based on a 'Public Health' approach had been adopted with a focus on early intervention. The executive summary of the report outlined the progress made in addressing community safety priorities and also identified areas for improvement and established priorities for the coming year.

Members were advised that the Safer Brent Partnership's priorities in 2024 were broken down into the following 4 priority areas:

- Priority 1: Tackling Violent Crime
- Priority 2: Challenging Domestic Abuse, Sexual Abuse and Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls.
- Priority 3: Focusing on Incidents Impacting our Community
- Priority 4: Protecting those most vulnerable

Following Councillor Harbi Farah's introduction, Will Lexton-Jones (Chair of the Safer Brent Partnership) continued by noting that his objective as Chair of the Partnership

was to enhance the structure and delivery focus of the Board's operations, as well as the organisation, administration, and tracking of its governance. The Safer Brent Partnership convened quarterly meetings. Over the past year, a number of delivery groups, including Violence and Vulnerability, Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), CCTV and Anti-Social Behaviour as well as Prevent had been established to address the pillars of the Strategy. Each group was led by a designated official who was a member of the Safer Brent Partnership. The agenda for these meetings consisted of an Action Tracker and Delivery Tracker as standing items, enabling delivery leads to report on their progress and milestones. Interim governance had been integrated into the process to scrutinise actions and set the agenda for subsequent meetings. It was believed that adopting a 'Public Health' approach was the most effective way to address complex issues, such as knife crime.

In continuing, Kibibi Octave (Director Communities and Partnerships) noted that the community had played a significant role in shaping the Safer Brent Partnership Strategy. Community feedback had been incorporated into the action plans and brought to life in the report, with initiatives such as knife bins and mentoring in schools. However, it was acknowledged that further work remained to be done, particularly concerning vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and those who felt unsafe, as well as harder-to-engage communities. Simon Egbor (Head of Community Safety and Prevention) further added that the Community Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and commissioned providers had focused their efforts on diverting individuals away from crime and creating positive pathways for them, which included mentoring, addressing mental wellbeing, and engaging through sports.

Having thanked Councillor Harbi Farah, Will Lexton-Jones, Kibibi Octave and Simon Egbor for introducing the report, the Chair then moved on to invite questions and comments from the Committee in relation to the Safer Brent Partnership Annual Report 2024, with the following comments and issues discussed:

- As an initial query, views were sought regarding the qualitative differences achieved by adopting a Public Health approach as opposed to a crime-focused approach. In response, Kibibi Octave (Director of Communities and Partnerships) highlighted the significant impact observed in relation to the Violence and Vulnerability Panel and the support provided to individuals aged 25 and under. The interventions made through the Panel had resulted in these individuals not reoffending, being harmed, or injured. Although measuring prevention was challenging, those who had received support through initiatives being led through the Panel appeared to be doing well. Conversely, younger individuals and some older cohorts who had encountered difficulties and harm had not engaged. Commissioned services were responsible for flagging individuals where concerns were identified. Simon Egbor (Head of Community Safety and Prevention) further noted that recent Outreach had engaged with a total of 320 young people. The evaluation of young people's concerns regarding movement around the Borough and crime issues was better understood in terms of next steps. The roundtable initiative, which involved young people in co-designing future activities and pathways, was also considered groundbreaking. There was a strong commitment to hold further roundtables in the future. Additionally, location-based work had been undertaken to better understand peer networks.

Councillor Harbi Farah (Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, Jobs and Skills) emphasised the importance of adopting a holistic approach to ensure accessibility to the voluntary sector was fully utilised and the 'Public Health' approach based on securing early intervention and broader sector engagement.

- The Chair put questions to officers on where they saw the 'Public Health' approach around specific tailored mental health officers for young people in addition to the type of youth work mentors were undertaking, such as the Air Network and St Giles Trust. In response, Simon Egbor (Head of Community Safety and Prevention) highlighted that with reference to paragraphs 3.23 to 3.29 of the committee report, work was being carried out by commissioned providers around addressing mental health concerns. To address challenges around young people causing antisocial behaviour and crime in hotspot areas, mental health services were closely working with other partners, such as VIA New Beginnings (who assisted with triaging dual diagnosis when it came to substance misuse and mental health). There was a vulnerability protocol regarding enforcement under the Public Health Protection Order which informed the work undertaken by community, safety and prevention teams. Bespoke work around the root cause, which could be mental health would be further undertaken. Kibibi Octave (Director of Communities and Partnerships) felt it important to also highlight the pressures faced by CAMHS given the demand led nature of their service and advised the Committee of the use of funding from the Mayor for London's Violence and Reduction Unit in April 2025 to commission further therapeutic services and emotional regulation workshops.
- Members commended the well-attended Community Safety meeting held on Monday 27 January 2025, which aimed to engage communities based on lived experiences. Inquiries were made regarding how the success of community based events were monitored. In response, Simon Egbor (Head of Community Safety and Prevention) advised that this would involve some of the issues raised being picked up by partners and commissioned providers. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were utilised to monitor the success of community organisations, and this data was subsequently monitored and tracked. A positive outcome was noted when a case was closed, and the individual did not reoffend. The Early Violence and Vulnerability Panel (EVVP) met regularly to track interventions and their effectiveness, including employment pathways and career-based activities. The importance of long-term evaluation was also highlighted.
- Following on from the previous question, members sought details on the reasoning behind the non-referral of certain individuals. In response, Kibibi Octave (Director of Communities and Partnerships) advised of the assessment criteria and way support was prioritised for the more concerning cases, particularly those involving exploitation or potential custodial sentences later in life. Referrals were also received via the Probation Service. Individuals in the Offender Management Cohort who struggled to settle were also referred with the importance of consent and individuals willing to receive support also being emphasised.

- Reference was made to pages 15 and 16 of the committee report, with the Chair seeking clarity on whether the referral figures pertained specifically to EVVP and young people at risk of violence cases, or whether this included data from any of the Early Intervention Social Services Teams. Additionally, details were sought regarding the trends in the referral figures, and whether young people were receiving dual referrals to different services such as Air Network and St Giles Trust, or if they were unique cases. Questions were also raised about the percentage of young people at risk who needed to be targeted across the Borough. In response, members were informed that the referrals were derived from all service areas, including Social Care, and Early Help teams. It was noted that the referral figures had increased from the previous year. The Committee heard that Children & Young People would be consulted to verify the percentage of young people at risk who needed to be targeted across the Borough.
- Members raised questions regarding the Safer Brent Partnership Annual Report 2024 not being considered at the Community Safety meeting held on Monday 27 January 2025 with access to information available on the Brent Safer Neighbourhood website also highlighted as an issue. In response, Kibibi Octave (Director of Communities and Partnerships) clarified that the Brent Safer Neighbourhood section hosted via the Council's website was maintained independently of the Council. The distinction between the Brent Safer Neighbourhood Board and the Safer Brent Partnership Board was reiterated, explaining that the latter was a statutory board comprising key statutory partners. The minutes of those meetings were not public and were therefore for internal use only. It was noted that the distinction between the Brent Safer Neighbourhood Board and Safer Brent Partnership Board websites would be further reviewed for ease of use and clarity. Details were also provided on the structure of the Brent Safer Neighbourhood Board. In terms of Ward Panels, these were co-managed with the relevant neighbourhood police officers and included representation from the local community focussed on ward-level discussions. In collaboration with the police, the local ward chair and panel members, priorities were identified for locally delivered and monitored on a regular basis. The priorities agreed upon with the panel were regularly displayed on the Met Police website, along with updates from the police.
- In response to further questioning regarding the structure of the Board, Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) conveyed that, in his additional capacity as Cabinet Member for Policing and Community Safety for London Councils, collaboration had occurred with MOPAC. Discussions were held at meetings concerning the Safer Neighbourhood Board and issues related to ward panels, which fell under the jurisdiction of London Councils' work. It was clarified that individual Borough Commanders were not responsible for the Board in their areas which fell under the remit of MOPAC and the Deputy Mayor for Policing. A meeting was to be scheduled in the near future to discuss the Safer Neighbourhood Board, including their terms of reference, the appointment of members, and the operation of ward panels. This followed confusion regarding attendance at Board meetings, the convening of such meetings, and the discussions held therein. In concluding the response, Councillor Muhammed Butt reported that he had met with community safety leads from several London

Boroughs and stated that the aforementioned points would be raised with the Deputy Mayor for Policing at their forthcoming meeting.

- As a separate issue, regarding Op Terminos, views were sought on the added value brought by the multi-agency approach beyond the increased police presence. In response, Will Lexton-Jones (Chair of the Safer Brent Partnership) explained that the added value of the multi-agency approach was substantial and noted that while police presence helped to suppress crime problems, a sustained result required a multi-agency wraparound approach, with the permanency of the Safer Brent Partnership being a significant component. In continuing the response, Simon Egbor (Head of Community Safety and Prevention) added that Op Terminos had a broader scope, involving neighbourhood managers, Social Behaviour Officers, and VIA New Beginnings, focusing on identifying vulnerabilities rather than solely enforcement. Members also heard that Op Terminos targeted a range of areas, including but not limited to, Brent, Kilburn, Camden, Westminster, Barnet, extending to the Burnt Oak area.
- The Chair sought details regarding predictions for the ongoing focus and funding of Op Terminos. In response, Will Lexton-Jones (Chair of the Safer Brent Partnership) highlighted that a one-year review of Op Terminos was currently underway, noting that the results were largely impressive, although the problem sets remained. The Committee was informed of the way in which Op Terminos was funded with modelling having identified certain premises and infrastructures as crime attractors, and where such attractions exist, crime would persist. A review of infrastructure and the optimal use of licensing and antisocial behaviour powers would be conducted. Will Lexton-Jones expressed confidence in the continuation of Op Terminos over the next 12 months.
- Members expressed a keen interest in understanding how marginalised groups were effectively represented in the development and implementation of community safety initiatives, particularly in light of the challenges highlighted in the Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews regarding engagement with families from these groups. In addition, details were sought about the specific steps taken to address such barriers and ensure their meaningful inclusion in shaping recommendations and outcomes. In response, Kibibi Octave (Director of Communities and Partnerships) conveyed that, in shaping the Safer Brent Partnership Strategy, efforts had been made to reach marginalised groups. Consultation exercises beyond Brent Connect were undertaken, engaging harder-to-reach community groups and diverse communities. To ensure the Strategy remained on track, the Culturally Specific Intervention for Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse (CIFA) had been instrumental in co-designing a course with perpetrators from diverse backgrounds to understand how offenders could best be diverted, and supported within that context. Similarly, a roundtable exercise had been undertaken to engage young people from diverse backgrounds, shape interventions, including perpetrator programmes for domestic abuse and serious violence among youth. Simon Egbor (Head of Community Safety and Prevention) further noted that the Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews were awaiting publication from the Home Office. Learnings from the review would be embedded over time. The CIFA programme predominantly included individuals from a black cohort and was culturally sensitive regarding access. Collaboration

with Gallop was undertaken for other groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, regarding domestic abuse cases under the advanced contract. Age UK would also be engaged in the delivery action plan to reach out to elderly individuals. Simon Egbor expressed the hope that an early offer would be received to support children affected by domestic abuse and households experiencing domestic abuse.

- Members queried whether parents, whose children were engaging in criminal behaviour, were aware of the support services available to them. In response, Simon Egbor (Head of Community Safety and Prevention) highlighted that many individuals involved with commissioned services, such as St Giles Trust and Air Network, were people with lived experience of crime who had successfully diverted themselves away from such behaviour, which represented the most effective form of intervention. In response to serious incidents that had occurred towards the end of the year, public meetings had taken place, and collaboration being led through the I Am Brent consortium was underway to adopt a place-based approach. It was noted that there was sometimes a lack of awareness among communities regarding the local services available to them. Discussions at a Church Road public meeting focused on how local understandings could be mapped internally. It was also noted that Children and Young People Services had conducted visits to schools, and efforts were made around the Family and Wellbeing Centres to ensure that local offerings were effectively mapped. A workstream was being developed to enhance parental awareness of available services and to ensure effective signposting.

Councillor Harbi Farah (Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, Jobs and Skills) further highlighted the underlying issues often identified in case reviews, particularly the failure of agencies to share information regarding mental health and housing challenges.

- Members enquired about the challenges in community engagement, including language barriers. In response, Kibibi Octave (Director of Communities and Partnerships) noted that further efforts were required to engage with communities through faith settings, privately run youth clubs, and dementia cafes, as these groups did not necessarily engage with the Council. The message to parents needed to be reiterated, as they might not retain the information if it did not immediately affect their child. However, parents were more likely to frequent faith settings. Community Safety campaigns were to be undertaken to highlight various issues. Collaboration with faith settings, shopping centres, and the London Designer Outlet had already been established to ensure that individuals were aware of where to seek help and support regarding domestic abuse. Engaging with the community and voluntary sector was identified as the primary method for consistently implementing long-term messaging. Feedback following critical incidents revealed that the community was often unaware of where to seek support and of the existence of available services. The acknowledgement of messaging challenges regarding community engagement was reiterated. Commissioned providers, such as United Boards, contributed significantly to achieving community impact.

- Concerns were also raised regarding the engagement of LGBTQ+ groups and the facilitation of their access to support services, noting that individuals within that group may feel less comfortable when it came to reporting crimes. In response, Kibibi Octave (Director of Communities and Partnerships) shared that the Council had initiated collaboration with Gallop, particularly concerning domestic abuse cases. This initiative stemmed from feedback received from New Beginnings at Cobbold Road during consultations on the Safer Brent Partnership Strategy. Although Gallop was not a commissioned service, it had partnered with the Council at various events. It was noted that Mosaic, which had been significantly utilised in previous years, no longer operated within the Borough. Individuals from cohorts in Kilburn were signposted to Mosaic at its current location in Camden. Communities were encouraged to establish organisations similar to Mosaic within the Borough. It was acknowledged that hate crimes were largely underreported and that adequate structures were not yet in place at a community level. Simon Egbor (Head of Community Safety and Prevention) shared insights from a Trans Awareness Week meeting held a few months prior, which revealed data on the LGBTQ+ cohort in Brent. This data was intended to inform strategies for reaching out to those communities more effectively.
- With reference to the committee report, the Chair enquired whether the support offered to adults was as comprehensive and diverse in terms of funded organisations providing additional interventions for at-risk and offending adults, as it was for services targeting young people. In response, Kibibi Octave (Director of Communities and Partnerships) in outlining the availability of funding emphasised that there was a greater need for further engagement, communication and support for older cohorts. Currently, diversionary work was being conducted through EVVP for individuals referred by the Integrated Offender Management Panel, which was bespoke and funded by the Council for more extreme cases. Further work was also planned focussed around employment opportunities and apprenticeship space to divert the older cohort away from crime and create more positive pathways for them.
- Views were sought regarding the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) model and the potential for its extension to support victims of domestic abuse. In response, Kibibi Octave (Director of Communities and Partnerships) explained that historically, IDVAs were designated for open social care cases, but their remit had since been expanded. The contract had been varied, and IDVAs now supported Early Help and were based in Family Wellbeing Centres, providing impartial and independent advice. IDVAs were also placed in the New Millennium Day Centre, following feedback from Citizens Advice and others concerning domestic abuse issues raised during debt advice sessions. It was acknowledged that further messaging was necessary to support victims of domestic abuse who did not have children to seek help from Family Wellbeing Centres or those in debt to seek assistance from debt advice clinics. This raised related questions about the scrutiny process for organisations such as Advance, the Asian Women's Resource Centre, and The Phoenix Trust. In response, Simon Egbor (Head of Community Safety and Prevention) highlighted that the MARAC and VAWG Delivery Group, which included action plans for domestic abuse, working alongside the police and other partners. Interventions and discussions were tracked in terms of performance and progress through these panels.



- Following on from the previous question, members sought further details on the process of scrutinising support agencies, considering barriers to victims' access to support, such as intrusive assessments often interpreted as disengagement. In response, Kibibi Octave (Director of Communities and Partnerships) explained that scrutiny of support agencies was conducted for organisations commissioned by the Council. Regular contract monitoring meetings were also held. Cases could not remain open indefinitely due to the volume of cases entering the system and the consent-based nature of the work. Data was available for high-risk cases, however due to resource constraints it was not possible to always follow up to identify potential reasons for disengagement. For service providers not commissioned by the Council, the Council relied on openness and transparency at the VAWG Delivery Group meetings to understand why victims were hard to engage or the reasons for closed cases, such as resourcing issues or capacity constraints. Will Lexton-Jones further added that aggregate data could be used to identify patterns among individuals who had initially engaged with support services but later disengaged, to understand the reasons, such as systemic friction or daunting forms. It was also noted that service providers would assess the range of effectiveness and internal performance of their staff.
- The Chair cited the lack of refugee space and the difficulties surrounding housing outlined in the committee report, raising questions about the availability of additional funding in this area and the exploration of housing options. In response, Kibibi Octave (Director of Communities and Partnerships) reported that she had attended a meeting with the Housing & Property and Assets teams to discuss the possibility of bidding for central government funds for women's refuges, which was currently being followed up.
- In response to further questioning regarding the pressures of placing ex-offenders in supported accommodation, Kibibi Octave (Director of Communities and Partnerships) highlighted that the concerns highlighted had been recognised with the Council not always aware of these placements and therefore actively seeking to address. The Council was aware of various approved premises operated by the Probation Service with placement support also provided through the Council's housing service. Challenges persisted with landlords operating unregulated HMOs for ex-offenders which the Chair noted had been raised with Laurence Coaker (Director Housing Needs and Support) in advance of the meeting for further review.
- With reference to paragraph 5.79 of the committee report concerning domestic abuse-related death reviews, members noted that the related website link had directed them to the Council's website, which appeared to display outdated information. In response, Simon Egbor (Head of Community Safety and Prevention) explained that a Domestic Homicide Review was currently underway; however, there had been delays due to historical issues related to conflicts of interest in the case. The review would be published in the near future and would include cultural learnings, information sharing with external agencies such as immigration, and details of the case. Members were also informed that a review was required for every domestic homicide that met the relevant criteria.

Four Domestic Homicide Reviews had been completed, with a fifth review being prepared, which would be signed off by the Home Office.

- Further details were sought about the extent of cross-borough collaboration in wards where borough boundaries intersected, and anti-social behaviour (ASB) was occurring in a particular borough. In response, Will Lexton-Jones (Chair of the Safer Brent Partnership) explained that Brent's borders with Harrow and Barnet were more straightforward to navigate, as these areas were all part of the same Basic Command Unit. ASB issues were discussed weekly with Harrow and Barnet, targeted directly, and mirrored by the Council's response to ASB. Concerns regarding aggressive begging were highlighted, with members seeking assurance that this form of physical intimidation would be prioritised by the police. Simon Egbor (Head of Community Safety and Prevention) further added that, in response to organised begging in Willesden, the Safer Neighbourhoods Team had undertaken enforcement work under the Vagrancy Act 1824, supported by ASB officers. Similarly, to address organised begging concerns in Wembley, CCTV operations and Community Protection Orders and Notices were utilised.
- Members recounted incidents related to a poorly managed hostel that failed to ensure the safety of its residents, resulting in ASB issues and a closure order being issued. In response, Simon Egbor (Head of Community Safety and Prevention) explained that managing vulnerable placements in the Borough, including social housing and multiple occupancies, was challenging due to the high concentration of vulnerable individuals residing in the same blocks. In the longer term, the Housing department was exploring the concept of sensitive letting. Closure Orders had been effectively utilised to address ASB issues. A service level agreement had recently been established with private housing to fund an ASB resource aimed at addressing HMO problems. Data was also being examined in this area. Escalation measures were in place, such as relocating individuals into supported housing where this was identified as a more appropriate approach towards their specific needs.
- With reference to paragraph 6.14 of the committee report, members sought details on whether the report pertaining to an Internal Audit conducted to meet the new regulatory requirements of the Social Housing Act had been received. In response, Simon Egbor (Head of Community Safety and Prevention) clarified that the report had not yet been published. The Internal Audit had identified areas for improvement concerning the service level agreement and the management of medium and high-risk cases within the framework of the service level agreement.
- Referring to paragraph 7.6 of the committee report, members also inquired about the highest rates of hate crime in Cricklewood and Mapesbury, and Willesden Green, seeking reasons for the increase in these areas, considering the decrease in hate crimes in other wards, and the planned interventions to address hate crimes. In response, Will Lexton-Jones (Chair of the Safer Brent Partnership) explained that during the 2023/24 period, most spikes in hate crimes were related to the Israel-Gaza conflict, though this was not necessarily the reason behind the highest rates of hate crimes in those areas. Will Lexton-Jones

committed to investigating this matter further to provide a more detailed response following the meeting.

In seeking to bring consideration of the item to a close, the Chair thanked officers and members for their contributions towards scrutiny of the Safer Brent Annual Report. As a result of the outcome of the discussion, the suggestions for improvement and requests for additional information identified were **AGREED** as follows:

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

- (1) Explore and implement solutions to improve information-sharing with London authorities and relevant voluntary/community sector organisations regarding out-of-borough placements, enhancing community safety assessments and safeguarding measures in Brent.
- (2) Provide detailed context, analysis, and narratives, to complement any figures/data in future scrutiny committee reports.
- (3) Provide a more detailed analysis on the impact of commissioned provider delivery on community safety priorities in future scrutiny committee reports.
- (4) Develop an effective Communication and Engagement Plan for community safety projects that ensures consistent messaging about available support, promotes varied communication methods, and strengthens engagement practices with local communities.
- (5) Explore alternative solutions, such as employment pathways, partnership initiatives, and funding opportunities for both the council, and voluntary and community sector groups, to more effectively address the health, social, and rehabilitative needs of older, high-risk offenders.

### **Information Requests**

- (1) Provide a copy of the Safer Brent Community Safety Action Plan 2024-2026.
- (2) Provide comprehensive data on the effectiveness of closure orders in reducing anti-social behaviour and crime.
- (3) Provide a detailed analysis of the factors contributing to the significant rise in racist hate crimes in the Cricklewood & Maplesbury and Willesden Green wards highlighted in the annual report, along with an overview of the current interventions aimed at addressing these increases.
- (4) Provide a copy of the Internal Audit Report 2024-25 (Social Housing Act – Anti-Social Behaviour) to better understand resident satisfaction with regards to antisocial behaviour in social housing.

## 10. People Strategy 2025

Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) was invited to introduce a report providing an update on the development of the People Strategy 2025. In presenting the report, members were advised that the information detailed the main priorities that would form the basis of the development of the People Strategy which would align with the change programme as well as the Council's Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) priorities. The executive summary of the report outlined the strategy would use the data held relating to staff and the local community, staff survey results and values workshop outcomes to drive equity, representation, and a future ready workforce. There would also be a focus on organisational priorities, gaps highlighted by the data, public sector priorities as well as industry best practice.

Following Councillor Mili Patel's introduction, Musrat Zaman (Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development) continued by noting that the People Strategy 2025 was an emerging document designed to support the change programme and future-proof the organisation. The Strategy encompassed several strands, including the HR structure of the organisation, EDI initiatives undertaken, feedback from staff surveys, and values workshops. The Strategy aimed to cultivate a workforce fit for purpose, focusing on both recruitment and staff retention. Despite an ageing workforce reflective of the wider public sector, the Council successfully attracted local talent through graduate and apprenticeship programmes, which were taken up by community residents from diverse backgrounds. As a public sector organisation, the Council had been proactive in adopting family-friendly policies and enabling flexible working arrangements. However, compared to parts of the private sector, the Council could not compete with salaries, resulting in certain roles being challenging to recruit to. A new Recruitment and Resources Team had been established as part of the Strategy, with the resources component focusing on collaborating with managers to build their recruitment campaigns and offering a more commercial offer. Talent management was also fundamental to creating greater career pathways for progression.

Having thanked Councillor Mili Patel and Musrat Zaman for introducing the report, the Chair then moved on to invite questions and comments from the Committee in relation to the People Strategy 2025, with the following comments and issues discussed:

- As an initial query, with reference to paragraph 3.3.3 of the committee report concerning resourcing issues for specific roles, such as Housing Surveyor roles, members enquired whether alternative recruitment avenues had been explored, including approaching universities and the funding of training opportunities. Additional questions were raised regarding whether colleagues approaching pension age had the option for a flexible and staggered retirement process. In response, Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) shared that the Council had achieved successful outcomes from the National Graduate Development programme with the success of a training programme in the Finance department also highlighted, with a good rate of return from trainees who were developed within the Council, left to work in the private sector, and subsequently returned to the Council due to its developmental support and flexible working hours. It was acknowledged that the Council faced recruitment challenges in the area of Planning, which was a national issue.

Options to explore apprenticeships in Public Health were also being considered. In continuing the response, Musrat Zaman (Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development) reassured members of the work being undertaken to support the recruitment and retention of key hard to fill roles including Planning, Legal and Social Worker roles. Part of the Strategy involved managers having professional development conversations with employees about their future aspirations over the next couple of years, including whether they wished to reduce their working hours or plan for more leisure time. Efforts to attract more young people into local government were encouraged, with initiatives to inform school leavers about careers in their local community within local government being undertaken. Plans to explore further options for providing graduate programmes to address long-term role gaps within the three-year Strategy were also discussed.

- Members raised questions regarding how the Strategy viewed the fact that approximately 40% of staff resided in Brent, with many others originally from the area, and whether this was considered a strength or asset. This prompted related enquiries about the lessons imparted to staff who were not from the area and how this was reflected in the progression of individuals through organisation. In response, Musrat Zaman (Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development) confirmed that 45% of the Council's staff were local residents who were best placed to advocate for people in their local community. Staff who did not reside in Brent remained attracted to the Council's diversity and ambition. The LGA was currently promoting a campaign to highlight the benefits of working in the public sector as opposed to the private sector. Job advertisements were now being displayed in the community magazine with corresponding links to application webpages, which served as a rich source of advertising. Graduate recruitment campaigns were also utilised successfully. While it was beneficial for the Council to recruit outside the Borough to attract specialist skills that might not always be available locally, work was also focussed on the provision of jobs to support the local community and to collaborate with other areas such as Brent Support, care leavers, individuals with experience in the care profession, and the Disability Confident Scheme to enhance inclusivity as a core priority.
- Members recalled from earlier responses that the LGA had given publicity to the campaign work in local government and were keen to explore what more could be done to, for example, lobby central government to subsidise training to attract people into various roles and provide additional salary incentives for specific roles. In response, Musrat Zaman (Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development) explained that the Council was a part of the Regional Employers Organisation and the Heads of HR Network where feedback could be received and directed to London Councils through the LGA. Lobbying around central government's decision to withdraw funding for level 7 apprenticeships had taken place. Changes to Housing Regulations around Housing Officers and the qualifications they were expected to hold in already pressured jobs were also subject to lobbying with London Council groups. Pay factors were more challenging as the Council was part of a national pay bargaining which impacted local authority budgets. In response to further questioning around retention of staff as opposed to receiving promotions where individuals moved to work in a different Borough, Musrat Zaman noted that this

was partly attributable to experience. Members also heard that support for BAME staff, underrepresented groups, women into leadership programmes, and greater diversity in senior roles were also being explored. The creation of career pathways through programmes and developmental conversations to support individuals with their ambition was also being explored.

- Members further inquired about the potential impact of the Strategy on contractors. In response, Musrat Zaman (Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development) highlighted that, although specific data on contractors' workforce was unknown, the procurement process required contractors to commit to offering the National Living Wage. It was acknowledged that contractors and the Council faced similar challenges regarding recruitment, retention, and an ageing workforce.
- Members also raised questions regarding the impact of the Strategy on the demand for housing. Given that approximately 45% of Council staff were local residents, they were directly affected by challenges in the housing sector. The costs of travel was a significant expense, but flexible working arrangements reduced travel expenditures for out-of-borough staff compared to local staff who did not incur such overhead costs. The significance of financial wellbeing for staff was emphasised, with support provided through budget management, credit unions, and salary sacrifice schemes with tax incentives. Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) further noted that housing and rent costs were high and reflected a London-wide issue. Efforts had been made to attract and retain social workers, with key worker housing offered in previous years. This was an area the Council would explore further as similar schemes for key worker housing emerged.
- As a further query, details were sought on how the People Strategy would ensure the effective integration of EDI priorities and what specific initiatives, particularly the measurable outcomes and timelines, would be established to achieve its objectives. In response, Musrat Zaman (Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development) highlighted that the EDI strand was integrated into pay gap analysis, including the Gender Pay Report. It was noted that the ethnicity pay gap was larger than the gender pay gap, and reducing these gaps was a priority for the Council over the next year. Inclusive recruitment was also addressed, focusing on job advertising and the accessibility of materials for neurodiverse individuals. The strands developed as part of the workstream were derived from the EDI Action Plan and monitored through the EDI Board, which Musrat Zaman co-chaired with the Chief Executive. The Board provided scrutiny and challenge in terms of measurable outcomes. It was reported that the Gender Pay Gap had shown a positive shift. It was further highlighted that dividing EDI data by directorate would help build a clearer picture and target actions by directorate, ensuring they were fit for purpose where the gaps were most evident.
- The Chair noted that Council staff had reduced by approximately 53% over the last 10 years. In examining the Council's responsibilities, delivery aims, and the design of teams and departments to ensure they were sufficiently resourced, details were sought regarding whether the People Strategy would assist in reorienting and reimagining the structure and staffing of the local authority. In

response, Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) conveyed that the People Strategy aimed to engage with apprentices and graduates, creating an attractive workplace that made the Council an attractable employer. It was also noted that staff reductions had been managed through the voluntary redundancy process. Musrat Zaman (Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development) further added that recruitment and retention efforts had also focused on reducing agency spend, thereby saving Council funds. Overheads were being benchmarked against other organisations. Data from London Councils on costs per employee and organisational structures by population size were being considered. For example, comparisons would be made with Ealing and Barnet, which were similar in size and population, to Brent Council's costs per employee and structure. Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) further noted the importance of understanding how funding was drawn into the organisation, taking into account council tax and housing rent considerations, to provide a clearer picture of income generation for the Council. It was emphasised that until the associated challenges were effectively addressed, it would be difficult for the Council to make predictions based on a zero-based budgeting approach, and services would need to be provided based on available funds.

- Views were sought regarding which priorities were perceived as making a notable impact. In response, Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) addressed the emerging issues concerning devolution and local government reorganisation. It was emphasised that current decisions and proposals relating to local government reorganisation could potentially affect the established priorities. It was noted that until there was clarity regarding the forthcoming changes, definitive decisions could not be made. While budget forecasts could be formulated, there was no assurance that the priorities could be achieved until the funding settlement was confirmed. Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) conveyed the significance of the People Strategy, highlighted its aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Council's current state, including identifying skill gaps. Additionally, the People Strategy would concentrate on succession planning and future planning considerations.
- The Chair was keen to seek details on how the People Strategy differed from the recruitment and retention efforts previously undertaken and requested assurances on the implementation of the Strategy. In response, Musrat Zaman (Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development) highlighted a number of actions within the Strategy that had not previously been identified. For instance, 360 feedback, which was currently available only to managers and the Council Management Team, would be extended to all employees following the implementation of the Strategy. Additionally, the values work that had been embedded in the Council's operations was a new initiative. A Recruitment and Resources Team had also been newly established as part of the Strategy. The Change Programme would focus on remodelling the future of the Council, including exploring digitalisation, artificial intelligence, and cultural change. The People Strategy 2025 would be reviewed by the Council Management Team, and the work programme would be managed through the Change Programme Board.

- The Chair noted that previous suggestions had been made regarding the potential provision of an on-site creche or nursery for working staff and sought an update on whether this suggestion was currently being explored. In response, Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) acknowledged that discussions had taken place concerning the provision of an on-site creche or nursery. It was indicated that this could be incorporated into the work undertaken through the Employment and Skills Strategy. Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) further noted that the flexible working arrangement, which included three days in the office and two days working from home, needed to be assessed before determining the cost-effectiveness of on-site nurseries, given the potential variability in office attendance. Musrat Zaman (Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development) added that the emerging trend showed an increase in staff having caring responsibilities for elderly parents and extended families, in addition to young children. It was also mentioned that staff networks were being consulted to explore additional support measures for working staff.
- As the Chair drew consideration of the item to a close, with the Committee having noted the update provided, the Chair endorsed the continuation of the process of revisioning the organisation's future to ensure alignment with evolving community needs, the careful integration of housing and childcare considerations within the People Strategy to comprehensively address residents' needs, and the facilitation of coordination with the Local Government Association (LGA) to enhance collaboration on housing and childcare initiatives.

## **11. Budget Scrutiny Task Group Findings Report**

Councillor Kennelly (Vice Chair) took over as Chair for the consideration of the item as Councillor Conneely presented the Budget Scrutiny Task Group Findings Report, which she had chaired.

Councillor Conneely expressed gratitude to the members who participated in the Task Group. It was noted that, despite recent statements regarding investment in local Councils, the scale of investment remained insufficient and did not address the need for fundamental reform of local government financing. The announcement of multi-year funding was acknowledged as beneficial. It was also noted that the Council had long opposed the creation of false privatisation and competition by requiring local authorities to compete for grants, with the indications of a departure from this approach by the new Government therefore also welcomed. The Committee was informed that there were fewer proposals in this year's budget, reflecting the challenges in identifying how the Council could operate differently given the available finances and need to focus on prioritising the most vulnerable in the Borough. The Task Group was particularly impressed by the ideas of adopting a more localised approach to accessing services. For example, social services assessments could be conducted in community venues with the support of organisations already engaged with local residents, rather than requiring new referrals.

Having thanked Councillor Conneely for introducing the report, the Vice Chair then moved on to invite questions and comments from the Committee in relation to the



Budget Scrutiny Task Group Findings Report, with the following comments and issues discussed:

- In response to details being sought regarding the understated benefits of the Community Wealth Strategy in the report, and with members noting the concrete financial returns from a local procurement perspective, Councillor Conneely, as Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group, responded that further discussions would have been desirable regarding the Community Wealth Strategy and procurement. Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) added that Councillor Rubin and Rhodri Rowlands were working on the Procurement Strategy supported by changes being introduced through the Procurement Regulation Act. Furthermore, as a member of the Cooperative Councils Innovation Network, Councillor Mili Patel noted that a Social Value Toolkit was currently being prepared.
- Councillor Conneely as Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group reported with regard to the Budget Scrutiny recommendations, there was a notable trend concerning financial stability. The Task Group collectively felt that, although financial cuts were undesirable, the Council was able to maintain better control than it would if it were to issue a Section 114 notice. Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) conclusively noted that the recommendations were positive in terms of boosting investment and debt recovery, and that teams would be robustly examining these aspects moving forward.

Having reviewed the findings of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group, it was **RESOLVED** to approve the Budget Scrutiny Task Group Findings Report for reference on to Cabinet and Full Council as part of the main Council budget proposals 2025-26.

## **12. Any other urgent business**

No items of urgent business were identified.

The meeting closed at 8:57pm

COUNCILLOR RITA CONNEELY  
Chair