



Item 7.1: Questions from Members of the Public

Full Council – 7 July 2025

1. Question from T.J Chaudhry to Councillor Mili Patel (Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources)

In view of concerns relating to practices operated by Brent in relation to debt recovery and enforcement, particularly regarding the cost effectiveness, proportionality and fairness of the process at a time when many residents face an unprecedented cost of living crisis, please could the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources clarify whether the Council has:

- (a) conducted a proper cost benefit analysis of pursuing sub-threshold debts, implemented adequate measures to verify enforcement agents' compliance with statutory documentation requirements and investigated the legality of their operational methods when acting under council officer direction; and
- (b) considered alternative, less confrontational debt resolution strategies that might better serve residents during this challenging economic period recognising that in some cases it may be more fiscally responsible and socially beneficial to redirect resources toward mediation services or debt advice programmes than rely on enforcement against vulnerable individuals.

Response:

- (a) The Council has estimated the staffing and operational costs associated with the recovery of aged debts. Taking into consideration the cost of resources the Council does not refer debts under the value of £250.00 to external agencies where the statutory fees applied under the taking of control goods act 2013 totals to £310.00.

The recovery service has considered the vulnerability of customers who may have debts under £250.00 and the likely impact of additional fees if referred to external agencies. To avoid any detrimental impact on customers already facing financial difficulty the Council has sought to utilise alternative recovery strategies entered a pilot partnership with Payment Plan to offer sustainable repayment arrangements at rate which is affordable to debtors.

The potential benefits of pursuing sub-threshold debts in this manner using the Payment Plan is re-engagement with customers who may experience

financial difficulty with a view to provision of support as well as improved recovery performance of aged debt.

The Council regularly meet with enforcement agents to monitor performance and activity to ensure they comply with statutory requirements. The enforcement agents are required to provide a number of reports on a monthly basis, or when requested detailing collection statistics, recovery case summaries or related activities carried out associated to:

- The accurate service of notices and documentation.
- Accurate record-keeping (the Council retains read only access to systems enabling.
- review of accounts, recorded notes, individual warrant, debtor and progress details).
- Compliance with fees and charges regulations.

Appointed enforcement agents are responsible for responding to enquiries and complaints received. Any matters raised associated to EA's operational methods are investigated to verify suitability of the EA's activity in accordance with their policies and procedures.

As part of contractual arrangements with the Council the suppliers must ensure enforcement agents receive adequate training and are regularly monitored to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and council policies.

- (b) In response to the ongoing economic pressures faced by many residents, the Council have actively moved towards debt resolution strategies that prioritise early engagement, support, and long-term financial stability as part of the Council's Ethical Debt Recovery policy. We know many residents are struggling financially, so we're taking a more supportive approach to debt recovery.

We are currently partnering with an organisation named Payment Plan as their platform allows residents set up and manage affordable repayment plans online. In addition we are piloting use an conversational platform offered by Webio who use SMS and WhatsApp AI interaction to make it easier for people to talk to us about their debts.

We also work closely with our enforcement agency partners to ensure vulnerable residents are identified early. We use Experian vulnerability markers and Open Banking data to better understand someone's financial situation and offer the right support.

We hold regular debt surgeries throughout the year in Brent Hubs around the borough where residents can speak directly to the team, enforcement agents and independent debt advisors. A recent event supported over 60 residents in one day and demonstrate how effective face to face support can be.

Our aim is to reduce the need for enforcement, assisting residents in the management of their debts in a way that's fair and sustainable.



Item 7.2: Questions from Brent Youth Parliament

Full Council – 7 July 2025

1. Question from Brent Youth Parliament to Councillor Gwen Grahl (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools)

The Brent Youth Strategy highlights the importance of amplifying youth voices and involving young people in decision-making, which is specifically mentioned on page 9 of the strategy. What specific steps has the Council taken since the strategy was published to ensure that young people's views are being actively used to shape local policies, especially in areas like crime and safety, which continue to be major concerns among youth?

Response:

Since the launch of the refreshed Brent Youth Strategy on 7th April 2025, a Round Table discussion was held with young people to explore their views on crime and safety, providing a platform for direct dialogue with professionals delivering youth services. The Round Table Project was developed by Brent Youth and Youth Justice Service and Community Safety to provide a safe space for young people to voice their concerns and issues, express their feelings comfortably and guide adults who work for the local authority to help young people in Brent. Mentoring sessions took place in advance with the young people to ensure they were fully prepared for the Round Table sessions.

The most recent session focused on young people involved in criminal activity or youth violence and included young people receiving support from the Youth Justice and Inclusion services. One young person stated it was *“fun...and reflective”* and they *“liked the concept of expressing ourselves to professionals.”* Discussions centred on the incidents young people had been involved in, when and where they took place, how it made them and their family feel, and their understanding about the wider consequences, including the impact on any victims and family members.

Young people spoke about their experiences with serious youth violence, knife and firearm crime, drugs, gangs and county lines, mental health and wellbeing, peer pressure, lack of support and activities after school, and challenging family dynamics. Deeper discussions explored the reasons young people felt led to their behaviour, the learning they have gained from reflecting on their experiences, how they accessed the right support to desist from further offending, and the additional support they considered would be beneficial for them moving forward towards positive outcomes.

The young people were positive about the experience, stating that “*we felt listened to*”.

The Round Table project has also facilitated young person-led discussions about online child exploitation, young people's relationship with the police, Stop and Search procedures, and the rights of young people in the legal system. Consent has been obtained by the young people involved and their parents / guardians to share short clips of the project to educate partner organisations working with young people about their experiences.

In addition, the Council continues to gather young people's views through a variety of community groups. “I am Brent” is a consortium of community organisations working to support vulnerable young people in Brent and champion their voices. The Council also has close links with the Young Brent Foundation. More recently, Designated Safeguarding Leads in Brent Schools asked children and young people about “hot spots” in their community and their journey to and from school. This has been shared with community safety and police with an aim for children and young people's voices to be stronger in ward panels in Brent. These are examples of how the Council is listening to make Brent a safer place for children and young people.

The Council has been working to establish a professional delivery group to oversee the implementation of the Brent Youth Strategy and is planning the creation of a Youth Advisory Board to embed youth perspectives in decision-making. Council officers have also engaged with young people at community events, such as the Jason Roberts Foundation Community Day, to gather feedback and understand their priorities for the action plan. One significant insight from these engagements is the need to improve awareness and understanding amongst professionals of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), which the Council continues to prioritise as part of its ongoing work.

Looking ahead, the Council is in the planning stages of developing further opportunities for youth involvement, particularly timed to coincide with the start of the new academic term, ensuring that young people's voices continue to be a central part of shaping the next phase of the youth strategy.