

 Brent	Full Council 7 July 2025
	Report from the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources
Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Chair's Report	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Council
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.0. To update Full Council on the meetings and activities of the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and North West London Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee since the last update to Full Council on 18 November 2024.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

That Full Council

- 2.1 Note the report and the updates provided for both the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and North West London Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee (NWL JHOSC).

- 2.2 Note that the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the 2025-26 municipal year will be provided as part of the next update report to Full Council.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1.1 The work of the committee contributes to the delivery of all of the strategic priorities within the Borough Plan as it seeks to support, advise and enhance the Council's activity. The recent activity outlined in this report contributes most specifically to the "A Healthier Brent," "The Best Start in Life," "Prosperity and Stability in Brent" strategic priorities within the plan.

3.2 Background

- 3.2.1 Brent Council has two scrutiny committees: the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee. The council also participates as a full voting member in the North West London Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee (NWL JHOSC). Councillor Ketan Sheth was re-elected as chair of the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee at the Annual Council Meeting on 22 May 2024 and also continues to serve as chair of the NWL JHOSC.

- 3.2.2 A scrutiny committee can review anything which affects the borough or its inhabitants, subject to its remit. The remit of the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee is set out in the Council's Constitution under the Terms of Reference for Scrutiny Committees which includes:

Adult social care; Safeguarding; Children's services; Cultural services; Education; Health; Housing; Public Health and Wellbeing.

- 3.2.3 As part of its remit set out in the constitution, and its role to review the provision and operation of health services within the borough, the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee can scrutinise, and make recommendations to NHS organisations or relevant health service providers.

- 3.2.4 The Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee's 2025/26 work programme will be finalised during the month of July 2025. Once agreed, it will outline the policy areas and council decisions the committee plan to review during the 2025/26 municipal year. Statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny recommends that for scrutiny to be effective, scrutiny committees focus on conducting fewer in-depth reviews of highly significant topics¹.

- 3.2.5 In terms of work undertaken since the previous update, the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee met for its third meeting of the 2024/25 municipal year on 20 November 2024. The meeting focused on housing-related

¹ *Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities* (Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government), p21

performance and challenges in Brent, with a particular emphasis on the work of i4B and First Wave Housing (FWH), Brent Housing Management (BHM), and the Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Prevention Service. The Chair of i4B and FWH reported progress in property acquisitions, emergency repairs, and compliance monitoring, but acknowledged ongoing challenges in tenant satisfaction, void turnaround times, and rent collection. The Committee also discussed the companies' role in alleviating homelessness and their involvement in affordable housing schemes, with Brent Youth Parliament representatives also raising concerns about the impact of housing instability on young people's education and wellbeing.

- 3.2.6 The Committee also reviewed the performance of Brent Housing Management, particularly in light of the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) introduced in April 2024. The department acknowledged that while transactional satisfaction with repairs was high, perception-based TSM results were low, especially in areas such as complaints handling and anti-social behaviour. This discrepancy was attributed to limited tenant engagement and communication. In response, BHM had restructured its housing service, introducing 25 patch-based Housing Officers to improve tenant relationships and data collection. The Committee also explored issues such as void property management, succession rights, and the increase in evictions, with officers emphasising that evictions remained a last resort and were handled with cross-departmental coordination to prevent homelessness.
- 3.2.7 The final item addressed the Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Prevention Service. The department outlined the severe housing pressures in Brent, driven by a post-pandemic contraction of the private rented sector, rising rents, and limited social housing supply. The Committee discussed the use of hotels for temporary accommodation, the impact of national policy on asylum seekers, and the challenges of securing permanent housing for homeless families. Throughout the meeting, the Committee stressed the need for improved communication, data transparency, and strategic planning.
- 3.2.8 The committee's fourth meeting of the municipal year held on 05 February 2025 focused extensively on Brent's Adult Social Care (ASC) services, particularly in response to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection and the borough's ongoing transformation efforts. The Committee were introduced to the CQC Adult Social Care Improvement Plan, which noted that while Brent was rated as "requires improvement," it was only one percentage point away from a "good" rating. The inspection highlighted strengths in safeguarding and leadership, but also pointed to areas needing improvement, particularly in customer experience and service delivery. The department emphasised that many of the issues raised were already known and being addressed through a comprehensive improvement plan, which included better support for carers, enhanced community engagement, and a shift toward co-production with residents.
- 3.2.9 The Committee were informed of several initiatives that were already showing positive outcomes. For instance, satisfaction among carers had increased and assessment waiting lists had reduced significantly. A digital and assistive

technology programme was also being rolled out to support independent living. Committee members raised questions about performance metrics, benchmarking, and the need for clearer data. The department acknowledged these points and committed to sharing more detailed data and benchmarking comparisons, particularly with boroughs of similar demographics.

- 3.2.10 The Adult Social Care Transformation Programme was also reviewed at this meeting. The programme aims to reshape service delivery through early intervention, strength-based practice, and digital innovation. The department explained that the programme was designed to work within existing budgets, reallocating resources where needed and leveraging external grants. The Committee expressed concerns about the feasibility of delivering such an ambitious programme without additional funding, especially given rising demand for mental health and learning disability services. Officers and the Cabinet Lead responded by highlighting the cost-effectiveness of preventative services such as reablement and underlined the importance of cross-departmental collaboration and integrated funding models with health partners.
- 3.2.11 Finally, the Committee reviewed the Community Health and Wellbeing Performance Update for the period up to and including Q3 2024–25. The report provided a broad overview of key performance indicators (KPIs). Members and officers held a detailed conversation on the explanation and solutions for underperforming areas. The Committee also discussed real-life case examples, emphasising the importance of improving referral pathways and public awareness of ASC services.
- 3.2.12 The Committee's meeting on 5 March 2025 focused on several key health and wellbeing issues. A portion of the meeting was dedicated to updates from Pippa Nightingale, CEO of London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust, on the pressures facing Northwick Park Hospital's A&E and the progress of its maternity services. The hospital experienced a 9% increase in A&E attendance due to winter pressures and a norovirus outbreak, prompting the addition of new beds and the opening of a 32-bed acute ward. Despite these challenges, the Trust reported strong performance in its Urgent Care Centres and improvements in patient flow. On maternity services, she highlighted substantial investments and cultural reforms that have led to improved outcomes, including reduced stillbirth and neonatal mortality rates, and a significant drop in midwifery vacancy rates.
- 3.2.13 The Committee also received an update from North Central London (NCL) on the Start Well programme, which proposed changes to maternity and neonatal services, including the potential closure of units at the Royal Free and Whittington Hospitals. The Committee learned that the consultation revealed strong support for service improvements but mixed views on consolidation. Concerns were raised about travel times, cultural needs, and capacity at remaining units. NCL NHS assured that detailed modelling and impact assessments had been conducted, and mitigation plans were in place. The Committee emphasised the importance of maintaining choice and continuity of care, especially for vulnerable populations.

- 3.2.14 The final item of the meeting was one that was put forward by the Brent Youth Parliament (BYP). They led a discussion on nicotine addiction and vaping among young people. The Committee reviewed local data, national policy, and Brent's public health response, including the establishment of a new youth-focused service within Elev8. BYP raised concerns about accessibility and underage sales, health risks and lack of awareness, engagement and education for the younger cohort and community and school involvement. The Committee praised BYP's initiative and committed to further action and monitoring.
- 3.2.15 The Committee met for its final meeting of the municipal year on 28 April 2025. The first item was the Annual School Standards and Achievement report for the academic year 2023-24. Also in attendance were Brent Headteachers representing primary and secondary school provisions in Brent. The discussion highlighted Brent's strong overall educational performance across a number of educational settings, ranging from early years to Key Stage 5 with the performance across the borough remaining good with above average levels of attainment across most groups. However, persistent underachievement among boys of Black Caribbean heritage was a key concern. While initiatives such as the Brent Schools Race Equality Programme and targeted support strategies were acknowledged, committee members called for greater transparency in data reporting and a deeper analysis of long-term trends. Headteachers and officers emphasised the importance of early years education, parental engagement, and tailored interventions, while also acknowledging the impact of deprivation, the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis on school readiness and outcomes. The committee sought assurances that the department will continue to collaborate closely with schools to improve the attainment of these groups.
- 3.2.16 Brent Youth Parliament raised concerns about inconsistent access to careers advice and extracurricular opportunities across schools. The department acknowledged the variability in provision and highlighted the council's targeted support for young people at risk of becoming NEET. The committee also discussed the challenges of equitable school funding, the importance of early intervention, and the need for better use of technology to reduce administrative burdens on staff. There was a strong emphasis on the role of school leadership, governance, and community engagement in driving improvement, with calls for more structured collaboration between schools, the Council, and community organisations to support underperforming groups.
- 3.2.17 The second part of the meeting focused on the significant workforce challenges facing Brent's Adults and Children's Social Care services. The report presented to members outlined the national and regional context of social care staffing shortages, particularly among regulated professionals such as social workers, occupational therapists, and Approved Mental Health Professionals (AMHPs). The Committee were informed that Brent has responded with a range of strategic initiatives, including retention payments, career progression frameworks, the conversion of agency staff to permanent roles and other initiatives such as the London Pledge and the "grow your own" apprenticeship schemes. In Children's Social Care, reforms aligned with the national "Stable

Homes Built on Love” agenda have led to a restructure aimed at integrating early help and social work services which has successfully reduced agency reliance and improved workforce stability. In Adult Social Care, Brent has implemented targeted recruitment campaigns, launched a Skills Academy, and introduced financial incentives to attract and retain staff. Despite these efforts, challenges persist due to national funding constraints, regional competition, and pay disparities with NHS roles. Officers also highlighted the importance of supportive management, manageable caseloads, and professional development in retaining staff. The committee also explored the potential of digital tools like AI-assisted case recording to reduce workload and improve service delivery.

3.2.18 Members raised concerns about burnout, supervision quality, and the need for better coordination between the two social care teams, especially during transitions. Both departments highlighted that while national trends influence workforce challenges, Brent is actively working to build resilience through strategic planning, regional collaboration, and investment in staff wellbeing. Recommendations included conducting a wellbeing audit, improving exit interview analysis, and enhancing the use of digital technology to support frontline staff. Members concluded with a recognition of the complex landscape Brent operates within and a shared commitment to continuous improvement in both education and social care.

3.2.19 Since the last report to Full Council, the North West London Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee (NWL JHOSC) has met three times; at Westminster in December, Kensington and Chelsea in March and at Brent in May. At December’s meeting, the Committee reviewed the region’s winter health preparedness, ambulance service performance, and health equity initiatives. Members welcomed efforts to improve service integration, virtual wards, and targeted communications, but raised concerns gaps in critical care reporting. The Committee also discussed the Health Equity Programme’s work to reduce disparities in health outcomes, particularly in deprived and ethnically diverse communities, and called for better collaboration with local authorities and the voluntary sector.

3.2.20 At its March meeting, the Committee discussed key updates from the ICS including the recent announcement by Central Government to reduce ICS/ICB funding by 50%, the abolishing of NHSE and the NWL Planned Care Strategy. The Chief Executive of NWL ICS addressed concerns about the potential impact of the proposed government cuts to ICS and ICB budgets, assuring that frontline services would be protected. The Planned Care Strategy discussion focused on reducing waiting times, improving patient communication, and ensuring equitable access across boroughs. The Committee explored the use of Community Diagnostic Centres and AI tools for administrative and clinical tasks, while also raising concerns about potential biases and inequalities in AI applications. The Committee also raised concerns about disparities affecting Black and Minority Ethnic and economically deprived patients, and stressed the importance of inclusive consultation, better engagement with young people, and collaboration with local authorities and community groups.

3.2.21 At its May meeting, the Committee had further constructive discussions around the Compassionate Care for All (Community-based Specialist Palliative Care) proposals. Some good dialogue was had with NHS partners and the Committee gave their formal response to the ICB which included suggestions such as enhanced care bed locations, increased communications with residents, the development of borough-level specific strategies and more focus on travel and access inequalities. The Committee also had informative discussions around the proposed move of the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre to Watford General Hospital and the NWL Involvement Strategy.

3.2.22 The work programme for the NWL JHOSC has now been drafted and the Committee are in the process of formalising the programme upon agreement from partners at the North West London ICB.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 Members of the Committee continue to be fully engaged in the development and delivery of the scrutiny work programme.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 There are no equity, diversity or inclusion implications arising from this report.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 There are no climate change or environmental implications arising from this report.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

9.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

10.0 Communication Considerations

10.1 There are no communication implications arising from this report.

Report sign off:

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