

Full Council – 7 July 2025

1st Labour Group Motion

Tackling the excessive use of smartphones to improve outcomes for Brent's children

This Council notes:

- The Labour Government's commitment to put children's wellbeing at the heart of national education policy, including plans to improve school standards, reduce classroom disruption, and tackle the growing mental health crisis among young people.
- National and international evidence increasingly highlights the negative impact of excessive smartphone and social media use on young people's academic performance, concentration, overall health, and social development.
- That organisations such as Smartphone Free Childhood, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and the Children's Commissioner have called for stronger restrictions on smartphone access during school hours to help reduce anxiety, cyberbullying, social isolation, and classroom distraction.
- That while many schools in Brent already take action to limit smartphone use, there is inconsistency between the different type of schools within Brent creating differing approaches, and outcomes between maintained schools, academies and independent schools across the borough.
- That Brent Council has strong partnerships with Brent Family Wellbeing Centres, youth organisations, parent groups, mental health services and school leaders, which provide a foundation for coordinated local action.
- That Barnet Council and Enfield Council have taken steps to introduce borough-wide guidance limiting smartphone use during the school day, providing a useful example for Brent to consider.

This Council believes:

- That the Labour Government's new approach provides an important opportunity for local councils to lead conversations with schools, parents, and communities about the best way to protect young people from the negative effects of excessive smartphone use in educational settings.

- That while respecting the autonomy of schools — particularly academies and multi-academy trusts — local authorities have a critical leadership role in convening evidence, setting out good practice, and providing parents and schools with clear guidance.
- That a consistent, borough-wide approach would help empower teachers, support parents, and protect young people, especially the most vulnerable children, from the risks associated with unsupervised smartphone use.

This Council therefore resolves:

- (1) To request that the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools commissions a deep dive into smartphone use in Brent's primary and secondary schools, gathering evidence from:
 - School leaders, teachers, students, parents, trade union representatives, youth services, mental health experts and public health professionals.
 - National best practice and research, including emerging guidance from the Labour Government.
- (2) That the council should examine the case for Brent Council issuing a borough-wide recommendation to primary and secondary schools by the start of January 2026, to adopt stricter smartphone use policies during school hours.
- (3) To recognise that achieving borough-wide consistency will require careful engagement with schools, teaching staff, and parents. Any recommendation made will be accompanied by practical support for school leaders, parents and pupils.
- (4) To work with the Secretary of State to undo years of dither and delay on the creation of a robust national framework on smartphone use in schools — one that empowers councils to act, protects children's mental health, and supports teaching staff and parents.

Councillor Rita Begum
Kilburn Ward