

	Full Council 07 July 2025
	Report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources
Resources and Public Realm Committee Chair's Update 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
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	<p>Jason Sigba Strategy Lead – Scrutiny Democratic and Corporate Governance 020 8937 2036 Jason.Sigba@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>James Kinsella Governance and Scrutiny Manager Democratic and Corporate Governance james.kinsella@brent.gov.uk</p> <p>Amira Nassr Deputy Director, Democratic and Corporate Governance amira.nassr@brent.gov.uk</p>

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 To present Full Council with a report providing updates on the meetings and activities of the Resources and Public Realm Committee since the last Full Council meeting held on 18 November 2024.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To note the update from the Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee.

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 set out in the Borough Plan 2023-2027. It seeks to ensure Council decision-making remains transparent, accountable and open, resulting in improved policies and services.

3.2 Background

- 3.2.1 Brent Council has two scrutiny committees: the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee and the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. The Council is also a member of the North West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NWL JHOSC).
- 3.2.2 A scrutiny committee can look at anything which affects the borough or its inhabitants, subject to its remit.
- 3.2.3 Brent Council Standing Orders allow for the chairs of the scrutiny committees to report to ordinary Council meetings on the activities of their committees¹.

The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee

- 3.2.4 The remit of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee is set out in the Council's Constitution under the Terms of Reference for scrutiny committees². The remit of the Committee includes:

Corporate policy, partnerships and resources; Budget; Customer services; Commercial services; Planning policy; Environmental policy; Public realm; Employment and skills; IT; Recycling; Regeneration; Transport and highways; Community safety; Property; Emergency planning and business continuity.

- 3.2.5 The Committee is also the Council's "crime and disorder committee" for the purposes of Section 19 of the Police & Justice Act 2006 and as such may review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge of the crime and disorder functions by the responsible authorities (as defined by section 5 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998) who make up the Safer Brent Partnership, in order to make reports or recommendations to Full Council.
- 3.2.6 The Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee's 2025/26 work programme will be finalised at the next meeting on 16 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

¹ Brent Council Constitution, Part 2, paragraph 36.

<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s123308/Part%202%20April%202022%20Procedural%20Rules.pdf>

² Brent Council Constitution Part 4.

<https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s123310/Part%204%20May%202022%20Terms%20of%20Reference%20.pdf>

recommends that for scrutiny to be effective, scrutiny committees focus on conducting fewer in-depth reviews of highly significant topics³.

- 3.2.7 Since the last update to Full Council on 18 November 2024 the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee has met four times (28 January 2025, 25 February 2025, 3 April 2025 (Call-in) and 23 April 2025).
- 3.2.8 The Committee met on 28 January 2025 where it focused on several key areas including community safety, workforce development, and budget planning. A significant portion of the meeting was dedicated to reviewing the Safer Brent Partnership Annual Report 2024. The report highlighted the adoption of a 'Public Health' approach to community safety, focusing on early intervention and multi-agency collaboration. Key priorities outlined included tackling violent crime, addressing domestic and sexual abuse, and protecting vulnerable groups. The Committee praised the multi-agency collaboration and community engagement initiatives such as mentoring, knife bins, and mental health support, whilst also raising concerns about gaps in service awareness, engagement with marginalised communities, and the need for improved data sharing and communication strategies. The discussion also covered the effectiveness of Operation Terminos, further cross-borough collaboration, and the challenges of managing anti-social behaviour and hate crime.
- 3.2.9 Secondly, the Committee examined the People Strategy 2025, which aims to future-proof the Council's workforce by aligning recruitment, retention, and development efforts with its Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) goals. The strategy includes initiatives such as expanding 360-degree feedback, enhancing career pathways, and addressing pay gaps. Members discussed the importance of local recruitment, flexible working, support for underrepresented groups and the integration of EDI principles into organisational practices. It was noted that the strategy also included a broader focus on issues including housing affordability and childcare, with proposals to explore key worker housing and on-site nursery options.
- 3.2.10 Finally, the Budget Scrutiny Task Group Findings Report was presented and approved. The report acknowledged the financial constraints facing the Council and emphasised the importance of maintaining financial control. The Task Group supported a more localised approach to service delivery and highlighted the potential of the Community Wealth Strategy. Members welcomed the shift away from competitive grant funding and stressed the need for continued investment in community-based solutions and financial resilience. The discussion concluded with a commitment to further collaboration and strategic planning to meet the evolving needs of Brent's residents.
- 3.2.11 At their next meeting on 25 February 2025 the Committee focussed on the Quarter 3 Financial Forecast 2024/25, the Council's approach to commissioning and procurement, and Brent's Draft Emerging Employment Strategy (2025–2030). Councillor Mili Patel presented the financial forecast,

³ *Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities* (Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government), p21

highlighting a projected overspend of £17.6 million, primarily driven by rising costs in housing, children's services, and adult social care. Members raised concerns about the sustainability of current mitigation strategies, the effectiveness of forecasting models, and the role of the NHS in cost-sharing. Finance officers acknowledged the challenges and outlined efforts to improve monthly forecasting, invest in preventative care, and recovering funds from NHS partners. The Committee also discussed the financial implications of supported exempt accommodation and temporary housing, with concerns raised about property standards, enforcement capacity, and the ongoing subsidy gap.

3.2.12 The second item discussed was the evolving work being carried out by the Council on commissioning, procurement, community wealth building, and social value. The department and Cabinet Lead presented a report to the Committee which emphasised a shift toward preventative and locally focused procurement practices. The Committee welcomed the insourcing-first approach, the integration of social value into contracts, and the use of the new Procurement Act 2023 to support local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and voluntary sector organisations. Members requested detailed breakdowns of procurement spending and stressed the importance of transparency, accountability, and long-term sustainability for local charities. The discussion also explored how social value commitments could be better monitored and aligned with community needs, including fair trade, employment, and asset utilisation. The Committee endorsed several improvement suggestions, including revising council report templates to include social value considerations and developing a public dashboard to track contract performance.

3.2.13 The final agenda item considered was Brent's Draft Emerging Employment Strategy (2025–2030). The Committee were informed that the strategy aimed to create a more inclusive and resilient workforce by addressing barriers such as childcare, language skills, and access to apprenticeships. Officers outlined initiatives such as the New Horizons Centre located on the former New Millennium Day Centre site and the Market Rent Reduction Framework, which is being piloted to support employment outcomes. Members raised concerns about the low number of apprenticeships, the need for better engagement with underrepresented groups, including the Traveller community, and the importance of aligning training with industry needs, such as bricklaying and green skills. The Committee also discussed the role of Brent Works, the effectiveness of job fairs, and the potential for stronger partnerships with local colleges and employers.

3.2.14 Throughout the meeting, the Committee made numerous suggestions for improvement and requested additional information to support ongoing scrutiny. These included enhancing tenant engagement, improving void property management, expanding the I4B housing initiative, and integrating employment-related social value into procurement.

3.2.15 The Committee next convened on 3 April 2025 to consider a call-in relating to decisions made by the Barham Park Trust Committee regarding operational

property matters and the modification of restrictive covenants at 776–778 Harrow Road. The meeting began with declarations of interest, leading to the withdrawal of several members due to prior involvement in related planning decisions. The call-in was presented by Councillor Lorber, who raised concerns about governance, transparency, and potential conflicts of interest in the Trust's decision-making with the Trust's actions, particularly regarding the modification of restrictive covenants, felt (by those members who had called in the decision) to contradict the related planning permission and to not be in the best interest of local park and community users. On this basis, the members who had called in the decision advocated for the appointment of an independent trustee and greater public consultation, citing Charity Commission guidance and a petition with over 700 signatures. The Committee also heard from a local resident who questioned the valuation process and the legal implications of modifying the covenants. She emphasised the need for transparency in the valuation brief and raised concerns about the potential for future development beyond what was permitted by planning. She also reiterated the importance of preserving Barham Park's heritage and the community's right to be consulted.

3.2.16 In response, the Committee heard from Councillor Muhammed Butt in his role as Chair of the Barham Park Trust Committee who responded to the call-in by assuring the Committee that the decisions which had been taken by the Trust were made in compliance with legal and charitable obligations. Council officers clarified that the covenant modifications would not exceed the scope of the planning permission and that the Trust had acted on professional advice. The Committee discussed the financial implications of the Year 1 estate works including lease renegotiations with ACAVA (Barham Park Studios). Concerns were raised about the clarity of the covenant modifications and the potential for misinterpretation, particularly regarding vehicle access and parking. Members also received assurance that the modifications were aligned with relevant planning conditions.

3.2.17 After extensive deliberation, the Committee resolved to confirm the original decisions made by the Barham Park Trust Committee, both in relation to the estate works and the modification of the restrictive covenants. While some members expressed reservations and a preference for referral, the majority supported the decisions, allowing them to take immediate effect. The meeting concluded with a reaffirmation of the need for robust governance and transparency in managing charitable assets and responding to community concerns.

3.2.18 The Committee met for its final meeting of the 2024-25 Municipal Year on 23 April 2025 and once again covered a wide-ranging agenda, with a focus on build quality in Brent, the Council's complaints performance, and the establishment of a new task group on kerbside management. Members approved the formation of the Kerbside Management Scrutiny Task Group, which has been established to explore how Brent's kerbside space can be better managed to support sustainability, accessibility, and public health aligned with the Borough Plan and key strategies such as the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy and the Active Travel Implementation Plan.

3.2.19 A key item of discussion at the meeting was the scrutiny of build quality in Brent, particularly in council-led and developer-led housing and infrastructure projects. The Lead Member and senior officers outlined the Councils processes for ensuring quality through design, construction, and post-completion stages. Members raised concerns on several aspects including recurring issues in new developments, citing examples from South Kilburn and Granville New Homes. The Committee pressed for more performance data and evidence of how feedback from past projects had led to improvements. The department acknowledged the need for better tracking and learning mechanisms and committed to conducting sampling reviews to assess changes from design to delivery and their impact on build quality.

3.2.20 Finally, the Committee reviewed the Complaints Annual Report for 2023/24, including focus on complaint volumes in Housing Management, Housing Needs, and Adult Social Care. Members expressed concerns around communication failures, delays in assessments, and service delivery issues, particularly in social care and housing. Officers from all departments showcased measures that are being implemented to improve communication, record-keeping, and service monitoring, including the use of Power BI dashboards and standardised communication templates. The Committee also discussed the role of third-party providers and the potential for recovering compensation costs from contractors such as Wates, with a recommendation to invite them to a future meeting for further scrutiny. The meeting concluded with a strong emphasis on accountability, continuous improvement, and the importance of learning from complaints and past project outcomes to enhance service delivery and resident satisfaction.

3.2.21 The next meeting of the Resources and Public Realm Committee will be held on 16 July 2025. As it currently stands, the items due to be considered at that meeting will be as follows:

- Budget Monitoring Update 2025/26 (to be inclusive of the Q1 financial forecast for 2025/26 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy MTFS)
- Recycling in Brent
- Update on Complaints Annual Report 2023-24 re Housing

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 considerations for the purposes of this report.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 There are no legal considerations for the purposes of this report.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 There are no EDI considerations for the purposes of this report.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 There are no climate change and environmental considerations for the purposes of this report.

9.0 Communication Considerations

9.1 There are no communication considerations for the purposes of this report.

Report sign off:

Minesh Patel

Corporate Director Finance & Resources