



Questions from the Opposition and Other Non-Cabinet Members

Full Council – 15 September 2025

1. Question from Councillor Kennelly to Councillor Grahl (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools)

In light of our neighbours in Harrow Council being issued an improvement notice following an inadequate rating by Ofsted for their Children's Services Department, and with increasing pressures on councils more broadly, can the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools set out the steps Brent is taking to ensure we're doing everything in our power to protect our most vulnerable children?"

Response:

Brent was last inspected under Ofsted's 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)' framework in February 2023 where it received an overall 'Good' rating.

Inspectors noted that "*Children in the London Borough of Brent benefit from good-quality help, support and care from children's services. They are helped by practitioners who are passionate and committed to improving children's lives and futures*".

Annual engagement meetings are also held with Ofsted which includes the production of a yearly self-assessment document for discussion. The Local Authority still considers its early help, safeguarding and services for children looked after and care experienced to be at least 'Good'.

It is anticipated that a 2-day focused visit under the ILACS framework will be conducted this autumn, prior to the next full inspection in 2026. Consistent data reporting alongside a clear quality assurance framework ensures there is management oversight of the quality and consistency of services to vulnerable children. Benchmarking data is also scrutinised to ensure Brent's performance remains consistent with statistical neighbours.

The ring-fenced social care grant, provided to all local authorities by government earlier this year, is being used to support the implementation of the national 'Families First Partnership Programme', including enhancing family support, early intervention and other services to ensure children are brought up by their families and those who know them best. The integrated model of working within Children, Young People and Community Development aims to maximise co-operation and pooling of resources, so that the most efficient use of funding is achieved.

2. Question from Councillor Choudry to Councillor Krupa Sheth (Cabinet Member for Public Realm & Enforcement) and Councillor Farah (Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, Jobs & Skills)

Will the Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Enforcement and the Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, Jobs and Skills provide an update to Members on the recent announcements by Cabinet to enhance CCTV across the borough using Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy funding from developers; as well as the criteria that will be used to determine the priority locations for these installations?

Response:

I am pleased that we will be using SCIL funding from developers to undertake a two to three-year improvement programme to modernise and strengthen our CCTV network.

Our priorities are clear:

- We will replace outdated analogue and early digital cameras that no longer meet the standards required.
- We will expand coverage in areas where there are clear gaps; and
- We will ensure a fair balance of cameras across the borough, guided by both crime data and local needs.

Precise locations for new or replacement cameras will be decided following engagement with key stakeholders and a full survey and review to identify where investment is most needed.

Key factors will be considered when choosing where to deploy cameras, such as the bespoke outcomes we want to achieve - whether that's deterrence, detection, or recognition; the environmental conditions such as lighting and visibility; the technical requirements for storage and future upgrades; and importantly, the legal and privacy safeguards that must be in place.

This scheme will be managed within a realistic and sustainable budget, covering not just installation but also maintenance and the ability to upgrade in future years.

This programme will deliver a modern, effective, and sustainable CCTV system that supports community safety right across the borough.

3. Question from Councillor Kabir to Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing)

After years of financial strain, the gap between the amount of money councils are paying to cover housing benefits for Temporary Accommodation and the amount they are reimbursed from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has now increased to £266 million.

Given the soaring levels of homelessness in Brent, and the council's duty to house families who present as homeless, can the Cabinet Member for Housing provide an update to Members on the impact of this subsidy gap?

Response:

The cost of Temporary Accommodation for homeless families is calculated as the difference between what Brent Council spends on procuring accommodation and the income we receive through housing benefit subsidy and, where applicable, rent contributions from tenants. For Bed and Breakfast accommodation, subsidy income is capped at 90 per cent of the January 2011 Local Housing Allowance rate for one bedroom properties in the relevant Broad Rental Market Area. For short term leased accommodation, the cap is 90 per cent of the January 2011 Local Housing Allowance for the relevant property size and Broad Rental Market Area.

The unprecedented surge in homelessness has dramatically increased reliance on Temporary Accommodation. In 2024/25, we spent £17.8m against a budget of £2.4m, an overspend of £15.4m. For 2025/26, the Housing Needs and Support budget has been increased to £13.1m, but forecast expenditure currently projects an outturn of £18.1m, potentially another £5m overspend.

Brent like much of London, is experiencing record levels of homelessness, driven by rising private rents, a broken private rental sector, and years of underinvestment by the last governments in genuinely affordable housing. We are turning the page on this chapter, but it will take time to put right. While we are implementing a range of interventions to increase supply and reduce costs, the timeframe to realise savings are too slow to match rising demand.

This crisis is not sudden, it is decades in the making. Central to the problem is the long-term dismantling of social housing, particularly through the Right to Buy policy. According to Common Wealth's Wrong to Sell report, they estimate that the council homes sold by English local authorities through RTB since 1980/81 are now worth a total of £430 billion (in 2024 prices). Of this sum it is estimated that £194 billion in public equity was effectively given away for free through the discount. In effect, the policy not only decimated councils' asset base but also shifted housing equity into the private sector, fuelling inflation, shrinking social housing capacity, and paving the way for soaring Housing Benefit bills to plug demand.

We remain on the frontline of bearing the financial brunt of these national policy failures. Brent continues to deliver one of London's most ambitious council

housing programmes, generating new homes and systemic solutions, but reforms are essential.

We welcome the new Labour Government's commitment to tackling homelessness at its root. Legislation such as the Renters Rights Bill, particularly ending Section 21 no fault evictions, will strengthen tenant security and help reduce inflows into homelessness. We have raised the subsidy gap with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, as has London Councils, and we will continue to press for reform of the outdated subsidy framework.

Locally, Brent remains proactive. Our Homelessness Forum, chaired by Crisis, brings together local housing associations, charities and statutory services. This collaborative approach is building prevention pathways and innovative support for people at risk, showing that we are responding with action rather than waiting for others to solve the problem.

The scale of Temporary Accommodation expenditure is having ripple effects across the council's finances. To manage the shortfall, all departments must deliver service specific savings and contribute to cross cutting measures totalling £10m this year.

Brent's subsidy loss for Temporary Accommodation for the last five years is set out below:

Year	Expenditure (£)	Subsidy (£)	Loss (£)
2024/25	23,047,652	19,235,705	3,811,947
2023/24	27,900,054	16,909,246	10,990,808
2022/23	18,135,981	14,402,839	3,733,142
2021/22	16,246,129	13,390,914	2,855,215
2020/21	18,674,044	15,372,812	3,301,232

It should be noted that in 2023/24, post Covid, expenditure and subsidy loss rose sharply due to unprecedented demand for Temporary Accommodation.

4. Question from Councillor Jayanti Patel to Councillor Krupa Sheth (Cabinet Member for Public Realm & Enforcement):

Brent Council has announced a transformational £14.5m investment to revitalise roads, parks, and public spaces. While this is welcome, disabled residents and parents with young children continue to face serious safety risks due to damaged pavement slabs obstructing wheelchair and buggy access. Several residents have suffered injuries from trips and falls, which we have flagged to Brent Highways for urgent action.

The SCIL funded Footway Reconstruction Programme for 2025/26 commits £4.8m to improve 7 miles of footway, that is less than 1.5% of the total network.

Between 2020 and 2025, Brent Council paid out £593,505.82 in compensation for pedestrian injuries caused by pavement defects and potholes. 328 claims were made specifically for pavement defects — 88% of all pedestrian accident claims. Brent's injury claim success rate is 14%, notably above the national average of 8%.

Brent's Local Highways Maintenance Transparency Report estimates the borough's total footway network at approximately 525 miles and acknowledges the need for continual investment to prevent deterioration.

Can the Cabinet Member for Public Realm & Enforcement therefore advise what is the Council's long-term strategy to close this funding gap and prioritise repairs in areas with high vulnerability and accessibility needs, including those with high footfall, proximity to schools, care homes, and transport hubs?

Response:

The Planned Footway Maintenance spend (£11m) is being funded from the £15m additional investment in maintenance and is a three-year programme running from 2023-26.

All local highway authorities have a backlog of highways maintenance, this having built up over many years when scarce capital resources have been utilised for higher priority projects. Brent suffers the same problems as other authorities and the ongoing imbalance between repair need and resource availability means that repairs have to be prioritised. This process is made as objective as possible to ensure as far as possible that aims and objectives are being met, and to ensure the process is transparent.

The process followed in Brent in prioritising footway planned maintenance schemes is below.

Prioritisation process:

Each year, the footway network has been assessed to determine the current condition of pavements. A range of factors is then taken into account to define priorities for maintenance:

- Network Condition - condition-based on outcomes of annual condition surveys carried out to national UKPMS standards;
- Network hierarchy - takes into account traffic usage, and proximity of local schools / colleges;
- Risk - Level of risk in terms of numbers of accident claims, historic reactive maintenance repair records; and
- Councillor nominations for maintenance;

All roads which are either highlighted by their condition score as being in high priority for maintenance, or councillor nominated, are also subjected to a site visit by a highway engineer, as a validation of the condition survey and to allocate a reconstruction priority rating.

Prioritisation Factors:

Treatment benefit factor

The treatment benefit is based on the condition index score, which is the percentage by length where maintenance needs to be considered (i.e. percentage in “poor” or “red” condition).

Claims Priority

Roads with a recent history of public accident claims for loss or damage on the highway are allocated a score in this category

Defects Priority

Roads with a recent history of reactive maintenance defects identified (on the footway or carriageway as appropriate) are allocated a score in this category. Reactive maintenance defects could be potholes or pavement trips, and are identified either through reactive safety inspections in response to customer reports or scheduled safety inspections

Nominations Priority

Roads which have been named in that year’s round of councillor nominations are allocated a score in this category

Hierarchy Priority

Brent footway and carriageway hierarchies have been determined according to the principles in the industry Code of Practice “Well Managed Highway Infrastructure” by Metis Consultants Ltd

The hierarchy takes into account current and expected use, resilience, and local economic and social factors such as industry, schools, hospitals and similar, as well as the desirability of continuity and of a consistent approach for walking and cycling.

5. Question from Councillor Lorber to Councillor Krupa Sheth (Cabinet Member for Public Realm & Enforcement):

Since at least 2020, when a Liberal Democrat Councillor was elected back on to Brent Council - the Liberal Democrat Group has been calling for the use of CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) to deal with the day to day concerns being raised by residents.

The Group has continually called for potholes and pavements be fixed, CCTV to be installed, enforcement patrols to be increased. Each time, however, we were advised that use of CIL for these purposes was not allowed and that it would be financially irresponsible to use the funds in this way.

The Cabinet decision taken in July 2025 to use £15m worth of CIL on the very areas that we have been highlighting is therefore surprising, coming as it does just a few months prior to the next local election and following the 2025-26 budget having been approved.

Whilst the decision to spend this money is welcomed it still only represents a fraction of the amount available.

Can the Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Enforcement therefore please explain:

- (a) Why was the decision not made as part of the budget setting process over the previous 5 years?
- (b) How have you come to the decision to spend the £15m in this way?
- (c) What is the total cost to the Council, for all remedial backlog works (dangerous pavements, potholes) to be completed?
- (d) Why has a one year “election program” been agreed rather than committing at least £15m extra every year for the foreseeable future?
- (e) How will you measure the impact of installing CCTV at the limited locations identified?
- (f) What will the total cost of increasing environmental enforcement patrols be and will these include night time cover when most of the environmental crime takes place?

Response:

This is a targeted, time-bound SCIL investment that addresses the most pressing public realm needs now—prioritising infrastructure to support investment in the borough, enhance safety and accessibility. The rationale was set out in the Cabinet report on the 28 July 2025.

In terms of the specific issues raised:

(a) Why was the decision not made as part of the budget setting process over the previous 5 years?

Community Infrastructure Levy is a capital reserve and not a revenue budget; an allocation can provide for qualifying projects within those capital financial limits rather than an ongoing revenue maintenance fund. Cabinet have responsibility for making decisions on CIL allocations over a certain amount. In this case Cabinet in July agreed to a one-off allocation of SCIL funding to support infrastructure improvement in relation to highways, parks, and CCTV.

(b) How have you come to the decision to spend the £15m in this way?

The programme is risk and need led, aligned to the Local Plan and related strategies.

The Cabinet report breaks the allocation down as follows:

- Highways (£10.683m): priority carriageways and footways (growth and intensification areas), 264 “at-risk” lamp columns, tree-stump removal programme.
- Parks & Play (£0.73m): path maintenance and accessible play upgrades.
- CCTV (£3.12m): Replace 130 analogue cameras, add 50 new in identified coverage gaps, network upgrades and enhanced delivery capacity, based on collected evidence.

(c) What is the total cost to the Council, for all remedial backlog works dangerous pavements, potholes to be completed?

Current reporting does not quantify a whole-network “backlog” figure. A precise backlog valuation would require an up to date condition survey for all our carriageways and footways. In preparation of drafting our provisional 2026/27 planned maintenance programmes, we have recently completed video condition surveys of our carriageways, and condition surveys for our footways will be completed later this year. Therefore, we can produce this figure when reporting our future programmes to Cabinet next year.

It should be noted the figure (£) will account for 20m sections categorised as “red” i.e. in need of immediate repair. However, we pick up full sections of road when doing planned maintenance, which would include sections of green and amber, as it is not practical to just do the red sections. Therefore, the actual cost to bring the boroughs roads up to a steady state would be more than the backlog figure.

(d) Why has a one year “election program” been agreed rather than committing at least £15m extra every year for the foreseeable future?

SCIL is for infrastructure to support development and can be used as targeted capital injections aligned to growth and evidence of need. It is not as an indefinite annual baseline. Future SCIL availability depends on development receipts and competing growth-related priorities. Current low levels of construction starts and a slowing of the economy will mean lower receipts.

(e) How will you measure the impact of installing CCTV at the limited locations identified?

In general terms, we would measure CCTV effectiveness by analysing trends in reported crime and public perceptions of safety through police records, victim surveys, and resident feedback. We would also evaluate the quality of footage for evidence, check for crime displacement, and assess operational compliance with standards set by the Surveillance Camera Commission. Measuring effectiveness involves understanding if CCTV deters, detects, or displaces crime, using multiple data points rather than just one method.

(f) What will the total cost of increasing environmental enforcement patrols be and will these include night time cover when most of the environmental crime takes place?

This SCIL proposal does not include resourcing for environmental enforcement patrols; it funds capital upgrades (plus time-limited project delivery support for CCTV).