



**Full Council**  
15 September 2025

**Report from the Corporate Director  
of Finance & Resources**

**Resources and Public Realm Committee Chair's Update**

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Council
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	One Appendix A : Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2025/2
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None
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**1.0 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 To present Full Council with progress updates on the activities of the Resources and Public Realm Committee since the last Full Council meeting held on 7 July 2025.

## **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 committees<sup>1</sup>.

#### 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 Constitution under the Terms of Reference for scrutiny committees<sup>2</sup>. 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

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<sup>1</sup> Brent Council Constitution, Part 2, paragraph 36.

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

<sup>2</sup> Brent Council Constitution Part 4.

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

Safer Brent Partnership, in order to make reports or recommendations to Full Council.

- 3.2.6 Since the last update to Full Council on 7 July 2025 the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee has met two times (16 July 2025 and 2 September 2025).

#### **16 July 2025**

- 3.2.7 The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee met for its first public meeting of the new municipal year on 16 July 2025.

#### **Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2025/26**

- 3.2.8 The Committee Work Programme for 2025/26 was formally agreed by members (see Appendix A). The programme itself is intended to be a flexible, living document that can adapt and change according to the needs of a committee. It will therefore be regularly reviewed throughout the municipal year by the Committee and updated accordingly where necessary. In practice, this means planned agenda items could be subject to change.

#### **Scrutiny Progress Update - Recommendations Tracker**

- 3.2.9 The Committee then proceeded to review the Scrutiny Recommendations Tracker, with a particular focus on the suggestions for improvement arising from the April 2025 meeting relating to the Complaints Annual Report 2023/24. In response to a prior request, senior officers from the Council's Residents & Housing Services (Tom Cattermole - Acting Corporate Director, Residents & Housing Services, and Spencer Randolph - Director of Housing Services) attended alongside representatives from Wates, the Council's current housing repairs contractor, to address service-specific questions related to Housing Management Complaints Annual Report 2023/2024. Members sought clarity on the overall strategic plan to reduce complaints, address root causes, and rebuild resident trust. Officers confirmed that a service-wide review had been undertaken, informed by resident feedback through surveys and other engagement activities. As part of the review process, a range of targeted improvement measures have been identified and are currently being rolled out across the service, including enhanced staff training, and upgrades to core IT infrastructure. The Committee undertook a deeper dive specifically into how Wates and the Council are working together to analyse complaints data, identify trends, and implement shared solutions. Weekly operational meetings were cited as a mechanism for tracking repairs, reviewing service failures, and refining processes. Further improvements in collaboration were pledged as part of the review.
- 3.2.10 While close partnership working was welcomed, members expressed concerns regarding existing accountability mechanisms, particularly around upheld complaints and the limited enforcement of contractual penalty clauses. The Committee recognised opportunities within the review to strengthen these areas. In response, Officers highlighted challenges within the current

complaints system, particularly around data gaps that limited the Council's ability to identify patterns of service failure and enforce contractual remedies more effectively. Nonetheless, members were assured that planned improvements to data systems would enhance analytical capabilities, supporting more effective contract management and enabling greater accountability through potential penalties or reallocation of work to alternative contractors.

3.2.11 Additional areas explored by the Committee included the connection between staff turnover in the repairs service and rising complaint volumes, alongside the cost implications of repeat repairs and service failures. Regarding the latter, members were informed that under the fixed-price-per-property contract model, contractors absorb the cost of repeat visits, thereby incentivising quality at first contact. The Council is currently paying approximately £5,000 per week in compensation, a figure it hopes to reduce through ongoing review and improvement efforts. Members expressed support for proposals to establish a resident group to co-design service improvements, monitor standards, and receive regular updates on complaints to promote greater accountability and responsiveness.

3.2.12 In light of the discussion, the following suggestions for improvement were made, all of which have now received responses from the relevant departments (as detailed within the Recommendation Tracker presented to the Committee at its meeting on 2 September 2025 available to view via the following [LINK](#)):

- Collaborate with the procurement and complaints teams to assess how complaints data and areas of underperformance can be more effectively embedded into the management and monitoring processes of the Wates contract, and the upcoming Mears contract.
- Develop a communication standard in collaboration with key contractors, such as Wates and Mears, to ensure consistent, transparent, and high-quality engagement with residents throughout the repairs and complaints journey.
- Establish mechanisms that enable residents to play a meaningful role in monitoring the performance of the repairs service and in holding both the council and contractors accountable.
- Ensure regular reporting on the performance management of the Wates and Mears contracts to the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.
- Develop and implement a robust guidance framework for succession planning to be rolled out across relevant internal teams and extended to contractors, with a specific focus on managing staff turnover and maintaining continuity of service in the delivery of repairs for residents.

## **Update on Recycling in Brent**

- 3.2.13 The Committee heard from the Cabinet member for Public Realm & Enforcement, Councillor Krupa Sheth, and received a report from the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods & Regeneration on the Council's recycling performance by waste type (food, paper and card, dry mixed recycling, Garden Waste) and service delivery. As part of its oversight responsibilities, the Committee examined the metrics used to assess recycling progress. Members noted that year-on-year comparisons of recycling tonnages failed to account for the growing number of households. Requests were made for more insightful benchmarking. Officers acknowledged the concern, agreeing that measuring tonnage alone was insufficient. It was highlighted that metrics such as kilograms of waste per household per year would provide a more accurate reflection of performance trends, especially when considered alongside population growth and increasing housing stock.
- 3.2.14 Concerns were raised about Brent's low recycling rates, with members seeking clarity on the financial implications of this underperformance and exploring opportunities for targeted improvements. Officers acknowledged the significant cost burden and agreed on key opportunities to improve performance, specifically reducing contamination in communal blocks and increasing food waste recycling. The department provided assurances that the estimated £3.6 million from the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme will be directed towards supporting overall recycling improvements, with a particular focus on these priority areas. Members welcomed this commitment, particularly through strategic interventions such as pilot schemes and partnership initiatives designed to drive measurable change.
- 3.2.15 Building on the importance of strategic investment, it was stressed that behaviour change is critical to improving recycling performance, particularly in key opportunity areas. The Committee questioned the effectiveness of the current communication and engagement strategy, exploring how council-led efforts could be strengthened to secure greater resident buy-in for recycling initiatives. In response, officers reported that approximately 80% of households required to recycle do so correctly, allowing in-person engagement efforts to focus on the remaining 20% where behaviours need improvement. The Committee acknowledged the success of targeted communications in addressing key issues, such as the incorrect disposal of items like nappies, and welcomed the effectiveness of localised, tailored interventions. However, members encouraged the department to strengthen outreach to underrepresented groups and diversify its communication strategy to enhance overall engagement and drive further improvements in recycling performance.
- 3.2.16 Other barriers to performance explored by members included the lack of enforcement of recycling standards among housing associations. Officers acknowledged this concern and explained that, while legal limitations restrict enforcement, managing agents are regularly reminded of their responsibilities to provide adequate waste and recycling facilities.
- 3.2.17 In light of the discussion, the Committee made the following Cabinet recommendations and suggestions for improvement to council departments, all of which have received responses (as detailed within the Recommendation

Tracker presented to the Committee at its meeting on 2 September 2025 available to view via the following [LINK](#)):

**Recommendations to Cabinet:**

- Lobby central government for legislation to restrict the distribution of single-use plastic bags by businesses and promote recyclable alternatives as the standard where feasible.

**Suggestions for Improvement:**

- Deliver a member briefing session on the council's recycling initiatives, outlining current efforts and opportunities for members to support promotion to constituents.
- Strengthen collaboration between recycling, housing management, and regeneration teams to improve the robustness and accessibility of waste and recycling infrastructure in new builds and estate upgrades.
- Strengthen outreach and boost engagement with young people to increase awareness and participation in recycling initiatives.
- Enhance and diversify communication efforts, and strengthen collaboration with local partners to raise awareness about nappy disposal and recycling options.
- Strengthen enforcement to ensure council waste and recycling requirements are consistently upheld across housing association premises.
- Explore the provision of a more robust alternative to the compostable caddy liners currently supplied to residents as part of the food waste recycling service.

**Budget Monitoring Update**

3.2.18 The Corporate Director of Finance & Resources briefed the Committee on Brent's overall financial position, presenting a report examining the financial outturn position for 2025/26, the Q1 financial forecast for 2025/26 and the medium-term financial outlook. Key financial pressures persist in temporary accommodation, Adult Social Care, and Children's Services, driven largely by rising demand. In this context, it was expressed that the forthcoming Fair Funding Review may not offer the financial relief that Brent requires, with the Government expected to revise local authority funding allocations through a reassessment of relative need, adjustments for Council Tax-raising capacity, and transitional arrangements over a three-year settlement period to support effective financial planning. The Fair Funding Review consultation has now closed, and the Council has submitted a response aligned with local priorities, aiming to influence the development of a multi-year settlement from 2026/27. The Government is expected to respond in late October or early November 2025.

3.2.19 Given the scale of change anticipated through the Fair Funding Review and the fact that the estimated £30 million budget gap over the next three years requires £10 million in annual savings, members sought clarity on the Council's forthcoming communications and engagement strategy. Specifically, early thinking focused on how best to engage residents, businesses, and stakeholders in developing the draft 2026/27 budget, with the aim of promoting transparency and securing meaningful input amid ongoing financial uncertainty and pressures. The Leader emphasised the need for robust and early engagement with residents, providing clear explanations about the challenges facing council finances and the difficult decisions that lie ahead.

3.2.20 Other areas of debate included Brent's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) surplus of £4.9 million, with discussions exploring its potential to fund targeted improvements in housing services, and the borough's low council tax collection rates, with arrears now totalling approximately £92.2 million. On the latter, members questioned the effectiveness of previous interventions and the impact of changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme. In response, officers outlined plans to improve collection by balancing support for residents with stronger enforcement measures, aimed at strengthening the borough's overall financial resilience.

3.2.21 In light of the discussion, the following suggestions for improvement were made, all of which have now received responses from the department (as detailed within the Recommendation Tracker presented to the Committee at its meeting on 2 September 2025 available to view via the following [LINK](#)):

- In future finance reports, provide detailed information on the balance of unallocated CIL funds, how they are being factored into financial planning, and their contribution to achieving the Council's strategic priorities and long-term objectives.
- In future finance reports, provide detailed analysis of Council Tax collection, including any ongoing assessment of the current Council Tax Support Scheme's impact on collection rates, and the outcomes of initiatives aimed at improving collection performance.

## **2 September 2025**

### **Establishment of Budget Scrutiny Task Group**

3.2.22 The Committee agreed the establishment of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group to review the Cabinet's Draft Budget for 2026/27. It was noted that the full membership of the Task Group has yet to be finalised but in the interests of transparency will be confirmed in the written minutes of the meeting. The group is expected to present an evidence-based recommendations report on the Cabinet's draft budget to the Resources and Public Realm Committee at its meeting on 21 January 2026. Subject to approval, a report from the Committee will then be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration on Monday 9 February 2026,

alongside the report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources on final budget proposals.

### **Brent Local Plan Review**

- 3.2.23 The Committee heard from the Cabinet member for Regeneration, Planning & Property, Councillor Teo Benea, and received a report from the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods & Regeneration outlining of the Local Plan's performance to date, along with the key priorities, proposed scope, approach, and governance arrangements for the upcoming review. Members reflected on the current Local Plan, identifying both areas of success and underperformance to inform the next phase. A key concern was the borough's ongoing difficulty in meeting both local and London Plan affordable housing targets. This prompted a wider discussion on the disproportionate delivery of shared ownership and student accommodation units compared to genuinely affordable homes, particularly larger family-sized units (3+ bedrooms).
- 3.2.24 Viability challenges were discussed extensively, with officers acknowledging the economic constraints that continue to hinder the delivery of affordable housing. Members sought clarity on potential policy interventions or incentive mechanisms that could improve viability and support increased delivery. Officers noted that detailed responses would depend on the forthcoming London Plan, to which the Local Plan must be aligned, but committed to keeping the Committee informed throughout the policy development process, particularly when analysing the policy options. Nonetheless, the department committed to exploring innovative approaches within the review. Proposals included the use of financial contributions from student accommodation developments to support the construction of affordable homes, and the potential merging of designated growth areas to maximise development potential. The Corporate Director highlighted that, beyond the scope of the review, there are additional opportunities to increase affordable housing supply. This includes reassessing the council's existing assets with a view to potential disposal or redevelopment, where appropriate, to support housing objectives.
- 3.2.25 Other key areas of exploration included: how climate change and sustainability objectives will be strengthened in the review, with officers confirming these will be central to the process and aligned with the council's Climate Resilience and Adaptation Plan, drawing on best practice from boroughs such as Islington; how policies will be updated to address the over-concentration of gambling establishments, particularly adult gaming centres; the importance of inclusive engagement, especially with underrepresented groups, with commitments made by officers to improve digital communications; and key risks and mitigations associated with the review, most notably funding, with Cabinet approval for general fund allocation identified as the only viable option.
- 3.2.26 In light of the discussion, the Committee made the following suggestions for improvement:



- That land value mapping be included in the evidence base supporting the upcoming Local Plan.
- Set targets for Local Plan priorities that are realistic, achievable, and clearly deliverable to support effective implementation and buy-in.
- Strengthen consultation and engagement with local neighbourhood groups throughout the Local Plan development process, drawing on lessons from previous efforts to ensure their input meaningfully informs the revised plan and supports ongoing, transparent dialogue.
- Enhance outreach with underrepresented groups throughout the upcoming Local Plan development process, applying lessons learned from prior communications and engagement efforts.
- In the interests of transparency and accountability, ensure that the Committee is regularly updated on delegated decisions made by Cabinet Members and Corporate Directors throughout the Local Plan development process.
- That councillors, via the Brent Local Plan Working Group, be actively involved in reviewing the findings of viability assessments, financial modelling, and policy options throughout the Local Plan review and the development of the updated Local Plan.
- Explore, through the Local Plan review, opportunities to strengthen policy mechanisms that ensure all parts of Brent, not only designated Growth Areas, benefit equitably from development.
- Explore innovative approaches through the Local Plan review to further strengthen the delivery of genuine affordable housing, climate resilience, sustainability, social infrastructure (such as community facilities), and green spaces across Brent, while addressing issues such as gambling overconcentration and other uses associated with social harm.
- For the Local Plan Review to consider strategies for providing a balanced mix of green spaces across all areas of the borough, meeting community needs equitably.
- Enhance developer requirements through the Local Plan review process by introducing higher standards for sustainability, climate adaptation and resilience, and build quality.
- Leverage the Local Plan review process to limit the use of the carbon offset fund to a last resort for developers.

**Next meeting: 4 November 2025**

3.2.27 The next meeting of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee will be held on 4 November 2025. As it currently stands, members will review the following items:

- Budget 2025/26: In-Year Monitoring Update
- Social Value Policy
- Procurement Strategy
- Funding and Support for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)
- Kerbside Management Scrutiny Task Group Review Findings

#### **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