



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

Minutes of the ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 7 July 2025 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor Ryan Hack

The Deputy Mayor
Councillor Narinder Bajwa

COUNCILLORS:

Aden	Afzal
Agha	Ahmadi-Moghaddam
Ahmed	Akram
Begum	Benea
M Butt	S Butt
Chan	Chappell
Chohan	Choudry
Clinton	Collymore
Dar	Dixon
Ethapemi	Farah
Fraser	Gbajumo
Grahl	Hirani
Johnson	Kabir
Kansagra	Kelcher
Kennelly	Knight
Long	Lorber
Mahmood	Matin
Maurice	Miller
Mistry	Mitchell
Molloy	Nerva
J.Patel	M Patel
Rajan-Seelan	Ketan Sheth
Krupa Sheth	L.Smith
T.Smith	Tatler

1. **Mayors Introductory Statement**

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance.

2. **Apologies for Absence**

The Mayor reported that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Conneely, Crabb, Donnelly-Jackson, Hylton, Moeen, Rubin and Shah.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the of the Annual Council meeting held on Wednesday 14 May 2025 be approved as a correct record.

4. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at this stage of the meeting.

5. **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor made the following announcements:

(i) Appointment of Deputy Mayor

The Mayor began his announcements by advising members that he had appointed Councillor Narinder Bajwa to fill the vacancy as Deputy Mayor for the remainder of the 2025-26 Municipal Year.

In raising a Point of Order on the basis of the appointment process for the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Lorber sought further explanation on the reason for the vacancy having occurred and ongoing role and requirement for a Deputy Mayor, given this had been the second successive year in which a change in appointment had been required. In response, Marsha Henry (as Director of Law) confirmed that the appointment of the Deputy Mayor was a decision made by the Mayor. Under Standing Order 27(b) the Mayor was required to provide written notice of the appointment, which had been received, with the matter then reported to Council and the appointment a constitutional requirement. In addressing the reason for the appointment, it was confirmed this followed a vacancy having been declared.

Having confirmed the appointment, the meeting was paused briefly to enable Councillor Bajwa to be robed and receive the Deputy Mayors Chain of Office prior to him joining the Mayor on the dais for the remainder of the meeting.

The Mayor then invited all members to join him in welcoming and congratulating Councillor Bajwa on his appointment as Deputy Mayor.

Members then joined the Mayor in a round of applause welcoming the new Deputy Mayor.

(ii) Outline of Mayoral events attended

The Mayor then moved on to provide an outline of recent events he had attended and supported, which he advised (based on values demonstrated across the borough in relation to community, justice, and compassion) had included visits to Claremont High School, being welcomed as the new Mayor by Neasden Temple; celebrating the achievements of the Brent District Scouts as well as marking 30 years of the first Brazilian church in Brent, joining the Lexi Cinema community run,

visiting the Open Gardens in Mapesbury and celebrating International Reggae Day outside the iconic Hawkeye Record Store.

In terms of his first official engagement, he was pleased this had involved joining young people, the Brent Multi-Faith Forum and local residents on a Knife Crime Awareness Walk along Kilburn High Road and Cricklewood Broadway in order to raise awareness and focus on the devastating impact of knife crime as part of a collective commitment to keeping the borough's communities safe. In addition, the Mayor advised that as grandson of a Dunkirk veteran, he had also been proud to attend an event to mark the 85th anniversary of Operation Dynamo hosted at ACE Café, Stonebridge.

In the wake of the Air India Flight AI171 tragedy, the Mayor advised that he had also joined other civic leaders at a vigil led by the Mayor's Office to honour and remember all those who lost their lives in the disaster. Recognising the community spirit demonstrated across Brent, he commended the way the borough had come together to mourn and support all those who had been impacted with the Mayor offering his heartfelt condolences to the families directly affected recognising the way that Brent and India were bound by ties of faith, friendship, and shared humanity.

The Mayor advised that he had also been honoured to have joined two local residents (Martha as a proud Jewish resident in Kingsbury and Esson as a devout and proud resident of Jamaican heritage in Willesden) to celebrate their 100th birthdays with them. The opportunity was also taken to wish all residents who had recently celebrated Eid-Al Adha joy, peace, and love, with the Mayor advising that he had been touched following a visit to Sufra's Eid Community Meal in order to witness food being shared between Muslims and non-Muslims demonstrating true unity and offering what he felt was a powerful reminder of the true meaning of Eid in being able to come together in compassion and kindness.

The Mayor advised he had also been pleased to join the recent Windrush Day celebrations at the Learie Constantine Centre to honour the powerful legacy of the Windrush Generation and recognise the courage and resilience along with immeasurable contribution made by the Caribbean community not only within Brent but the country as a whole. Highlighting that the Willesden Temple was marking its 50th anniversary the Mayor advised he had also been honoured to accept an official invitation from the local Mandir to the Festival of Golden Hearts representing the borough. Being able to welcome devotees to the Mayor's Parlour to rekindle the light, as they looked ahead to the temple's centenary was also highlighted as a special moment, with the temple recognised as more than a place of worship given its beacon of kindness, peace, and love that had touched so many lives.

The Mayor advised that he had also been proud to host a recent flag raising ceremony to celebrate Pride, reflecting on the history of the movement in terms of liberation and a renewed commitment to protest and progress. The opportunity was also taken to reaffirm Brent as a borough where the LGBTQ community was also seen, valued, and always welcome in recognition that everyone deserved the freedom to love and live as their true selves.

Turning to other cultural events, the Mayor advised he had also been deeply honoured to have been able to organise an evening of Irish Culture at Katie's Bar in

Neasden recognising not only his own, but Brent's identity and spirit as having been profoundly shaped by the Irish community, whose culture, history, and resilience. As Mayor, he advised he had also been privileged to attend the Service of Celebration marking 30 Years of Resilience at Montserrat's Soufrière Hills Volcano Anniversary. Members were advised of the fondness in which he held Montserrat, known as the Emerald Island, as the only place outside Ireland where St. Patrick's Day was celebrated as a national bank holiday providing a reminder of the deep bonds between Irish culture and African-Caribbean heritage, which had been forged through strength and unity over generations.

In terms of upcoming events, the Mayor advised he was also looking forward to hosting an Irish Afternoon Tea Party at the Cricklewood Railway Club.

In ending , the Mayor also took the opportunity to highlight the honour he felt in being able to welcome Brent's newest citizens in his role hosting the borough's Citizenship Ceremonies with Brent, he pointed out, proudly standing as a beacon of diversity and inclusion and where individuals from whatever background would always continue to be welcomed.

(iii) Petitions

As a final announcement, the Mayor referred members to the list of current petitions tabled at the meeting, in accordance with Standing Orders which also detailed the action being taken to deal with them.

6. **Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies and Appointment of Chairs/Vice Chairs**

The Mayor referred members to the list of changes circulated in relation to appointments to Council Committees, Sub Committees and other bodies.

Having considered the changes outlined it was **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note that effective from 16 June 2025 the Leader of the Council had appointed Councillor Promise Knight (following her return from Maternity Leave) to fill the position of Cabinet Member for Customer Experience, Resident Support and Culture with Councillor Fleur Donnelly-Jackson to remain as Cabinet Member for Housing.
- (2) To approve the following changes in committee membership:
 - (a) Councillor Collymore to replace Councillor Fraser as a full member of the Community & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, with Councillor Afzal to replace Councillor Fraser as Vice-Chair.
 - (b) Councillor Collymore to replace Councillor Fraser as a substitute member of the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee.
 - (c) Councillor Fraser to be replaced by a vacancy as substitute member on the Northwest London Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee

- (d) Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee - Councillor Teo Benea to replace Councillor Diana Collymore as a substitute member.
- (3) To approve the following changes in the membership on outside bodies:
 - (a) Councillor Fraser to be replaced by a vacancy as one of the Council representatives on the Chalkhill Community Trust Fund.
- (4) To approve the re appointment of David Ewart as Independent Chair of the Audit & Standards Advisory Committee and Pension Board for an additional 15-month term of office, ending on 31 December 2026.

In response to a Point of Order raised by Councillor Lorber in relation to the filling of vacancies identified within the appointments outlined, Marsha Henry (as Director of Law) advised that these remained seats to be filled by the Labour Group and were being held vacant in advance of appointments being made in due course.

7. **Deputations (if any)**

The Mayor advised that no requests had been received for the presentation of any deputations at the meeting.

8. **Questions from Members of the Public & Brent Youth Parliament**

8.1 **Questions from the Public**

The Mayor advised that one question had been received from a member of the public, for consideration at the meeting which was as follows:

Question 1 from Ms T.J.Chaudhry regarding the Council's approach towards debt management, recovery & enforcement.

In noting the written response provided by the Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, as circulated with the agenda, the Mayor informed members that Ms Chaudhry had also been offered the opportunity to attend the meeting in order to ask a follow up supplementary question and advised he was therefore pleased to welcome Ms Chaudhry to the meeting.

Following the Mayors introduction, the following supplementary question was raised:

Question 1 supplementary Question from Ms T.J Chaudhry to Councillor Mili Patel, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources

Given the legal obligations under Paragraph 7(2) of Schedule 12 to the Tribunals, Courts and Enforcement Act 2007 and the proportionality duty in Section 15 of the Public Law Act 1998, can the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources:

- (1) State how many enforcement agent contracts have been revoked since 2021 for failing to produce proper written authority or breaching debt collection regulations, as required by law.

- (2) Confirm if Brent's policy on small debts has been updated since the 2021 High Court ruling against blanket approaches without individual assessments; and
- (3) Explain why it uses Experian's system rather than the Financial Conduct Authority's full vulnerability criteria, and whether it will adopt proper 'breathing space' schemes given that current alternatives lack these legal protections?

In raising the question, Ms Chaudhry also referred to various examples of case law in support including:

- (per *R (Kamby) v Birmingham Magistrates' Court* [2021]) or breaches of the *Taking Control of Goods Regulations 2013*.
- 'sub-threshold debt' policy *R (CPAG) v Secretary of State* [2021], which ruled blanket approaches unlawful without individual vulnerability assessments.
- *FCA's holistic vulnerability definition* (e.g., health crises, literacy barriers, per *R (Bridges)* [2020]), breathing space' schemes (*Leeds City Council v Broadley* [2022])

In response, Councillor Mili Patel thanked Ms Chaudhry for the questions and advised that given the detailed nature of the legal and technical issues raised, she would need to arrange for a full written response to be provided following the meeting.

In terms of the Council's broader approach towards Council Tax collection and debt recovery the opportunity was taken to highlight the importance of the "one borough, one community" way in which the system operated, stressing the importance in the way residents were currently expected (under the current funding regime) to contribute, as local taxpayers, for services being provided through the Council. The impact of ongoing social and economic pressures along with the cost-of-living crisis and programme of austerity introduced under the previous government had, however, been recognised in terms of many residents struggling financially and the resulting effect in terms of areas such as Council Tax arrears and enhanced debt.

In response to these ongoing pressures, the Council had therefore actively moved towards debt resolution strategies that prioritised early engagement, support, and long-term financial stability as part of the Council's Ethical Debt Recovery policy in order to provide a more supportive approach to debt recovery. This included an aim to reduce the need for enforcement, assisting residents in the management of their debts in a way that was fair and sustainable.

The opportunity was also taken to offer to meet with Ms Chaudhry in order to discuss any further issues or concerns regarding the approach outlined.

Having thanked Councillor Mili Patel for the response provided and Ms Chaudhry for attending the meeting to ask her supplementary question, the Mayor then moved on to deal with a question submitted by Brent Youth Parliament.

8.2 Questions from Brent Youth Parliament

The Mayor advised that the following question had been received from Brent Youth Parliament:

Question 1 from Brent Youth Parliament to Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools, relating to the engagement of young people under the Brent Youth Strategy in shaping local policies, especially in areas like crime and safety.

The Mayor thanked Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) for their question, with members noting the written response provided, and advised that representatives from the Youth Parliament had also been invited to attend the meeting in order to ask a supplementary question. As a result, the Mayor welcomed Kiran Govan from BYP to the meeting who asked the following supplementary question.

Question 1 Supplementary Question from Kiran Govan to Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools regarding the steps taken by Brent Council in supporting the promises made in their Brent Youth Strategy to include young people in policy making decisions.

Having thanked Councillor Grahl for her written response and referenced the Brent Youth Strategy, Kiran Govan highlighted the pledge which had been made by the Council to ensure positive activities were made available for young people. Based on the written response provided by the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools, which indicated that the Council was now in the planning stages of developing further opportunities for young people's involvement, in advance of the new academic year, details were sought on how the Council planned to obtain funding for these activities, how much new funding the Council planned to allocate toward these initiatives and what specific kinds of positive activities the Council planned to offer the younger generation in Brent.

In response, Councillor Grahl thanked Brent Youth Parliament for the question and work they were continuing to undertake to represent young people across the borough. Acknowledging the importance of the issues raised, the opportunity was taken, in responding to the question, to outline the different type of funding opportunities and activities being explored along with the existing and extensive nature of support already being provided for youth activities. This included funding being provided for over 70 different grassroots organisations across the borough with these organisations providing a diverse range of activities for young people and the Council having successfully secured approx. £1m in grant funding from the Mayor of London specifically to contribute towards youth organisations and additional activities, with Councillor Grahl advising she would be happy to provide a more detailed outline (given time constraints at the meeting) in relation to the activities being developed outside of the meeting.

The Mayor also took the opportunity to acknowledge and commend BYP for the work undertaken in seeking to represent young people across the borough and, in outlining his support for the contribution made, thanked Councillor Grahl for her response and Kiran Govan for attending the meeting in order to ask his supplementary question. With no further questions to be considered, the Mayor advised that concluded the public question session.

9. Petitions

The Mayor advised that he had accepted requests for the presentation of three separate petitions at the meeting, which had all met the threshold for consideration at Full Council based on them containing more than 200 signatures.

The petitions to be presented, were as follows, with the Mayor advising that unless otherwise indicated by members, he intended to allow up to five minutes for the presentation of each petition by the lead petitioner before then providing the relevant Cabinet Members up to two minutes to respond on each matter:

- 1st petition - No to Twinning with Nablus
- 2nd petition – Save East Lane Theatre; and
- 3rd petition – Save Barham Park

(1) No to Twinning with Nablus

As no objections were raised on the approach outlined, the Mayor then moved on to welcome Ian Collier to the meeting to present the first petition. Prior to the petition being presented the Mayor felt it important to remind everyone, given the matter related to the Council's proposed twinning arrangement with Nablus (and as he had done when the issue had been considered at the Annual Council meeting) of his focus in seeking to celebrate the diverse nature of the borough and recognise the peaceful relationships that existed between the many different communities residing in Brent, reflecting the strong level of community cohesion across the borough. As such he hoped all those present would be able to remember those principles during consideration of the petition, for which he thanked everyone in advance for their support.

Ian Collier was then invited to present the petition, who began by thanking the Mayor for the opportunity to represent a significant group of residents in Brent who he advised were completely opposed to, as well as upset by, the Council's recent decision to twin the borough with the town of Nablus. In referring to comments made by the sponsor of the twinning initiative about "twinning affirming the commitment of the borough to solidarity and shared values" he highlighted concerns regarding Nablus being a focus of militancy, hatred, terror and racism which he felt need to be taken into account in order to reflect that Brent as a borough did not share these values or stand in solidarity with them and with the normal reasons for twinning (including tourism, education and cultural influences) it was felt also not being met.

As a result, he advised the petitioners in opposition to the arrangement had been forced to conclude that the process was nothing more than political symbolism reflecting religious sectarianism in a way that was unrepresentative of the majority of Brent's residents. In referring to the most recent example of sectarian politics in the UK, he outlined the impact of the troubles in Northern Ireland and called on the Council to avoid a return to religious sectarian politics feeling that the recent decision to twin with Nablus had created division across the borough and driven a wedge between different communities.

Highlighting that the names of those who had signed the petition represented a diverse array of faiths and communities from different ethnic backgrounds across the borough he highlighted what he felt had been the underrepresentation of those from the Muslim community, which he felt also served as a reminder of the division

which the twinning decision had appeared to create within the local community. It was, however, felt this should not be a surprise given the report presented at the time the decision had been approved had suggested that the twinning process ran the risk of causing disharmony amongst Brent's rich mix of ethnic communities. It was therefore with regret, given the potential risk identified, that the Council had decided to proceed with the twinning arrangement, which he felt was also potentially open to challenge under the Council's duties under the Equalities Act.

The assertion that objecting to the twinning arrangement may be regarded as Islamophobic was also challenged, with it pointed out that those who had signed the petition would have had no objection to a similar arrangement being pursued with other more peaceful Muslim regions or cities across the world. Concern was also expressed regarding the status of the governance arrangements in Nablus and alleged links to a Proscribed Organisation alongside the establishment of a Community Interest Company (CIC) to facilitate the twinning arrangement given the less regulated nature of this as a mechanism and associated difficulty in ensuring the necessary governance, with the example provided of the "Save one Life" charity which he advised was currently under investigation by the Charities Commission and Counter Terrorism police.

At this stage in proceedings the Mayor advised Ian Collier than the time available to complete presentation of the petition had expired. Using the discretion available to him as Chair he advised that he would, however, allow a brief final statement to be provided by Ian Collier in summing up.

In thanking the Mayor for the opportunity to conclude, Ian Collier advised that on balance the petitioners felt the twinning application was controversial, damaging to community cohesion, divisive, destabilising, disruptive, inflammatory as well as sectarian in nature. As such, he felt its approval had brought the borough into disrepute with those who had signed the petition urging the Council to immediately overturn their original decision to approve the twinning arrangement with Nablus in order to avoid any more harm and damage to community relations and the Council's reputation being caused.

The Mayor thanked Ian Collier for presenting the petition and then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader of the Council to respond.

In response, the Leader began by acknowledging the strength of feeling identified within the petition on the issue and took the opportunity to thank all also those in attendance at the meeting for consideration of the item, whether seeking to support the petition or twinning arrangement. Referring to the comment regarding the limited number of signatures from members of the Muslim community contained within the petition, he expressed concern given it appeared, at one stage, that the names of most Brent councillors from a Muslim background had been added without their consent but was pleased to note that this issue and any misunderstanding had subsequently been resolved.

In terms of the petition, the Leader felt that irrespective of the views represented it was important that everyone had the opportunity to express their voice with an assurance provided that the petitioners were recognised as caring deeply about the borough, its values and shared future and the opportunity taken to welcome the diversity and plurality of views that existed across the borough. Given the concerns

expressed within the petition he felt it important to acknowledge and value the deep rooted and vibrant Jewish community within the borough which could be traced back many generations and he was also keen to see continue to grow and flourish.

In recognising Brent as a place of many cultures and faiths, the Leader highlighted what he regarded as the duty on the Council to therefore make sure that all residents felt safe, respected and heard emphasising that the forthcoming twinning of Brent with Nablus (or under any other future arrangement) was not about endorsing any religious belief or political ideology and was instead based on the principles of peace, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding. Assuring the petitioners that the promotion of these principles had been the basis on which the borough's international relationships had, and would continue, to be based the Leader also felt it important to recognise Brent's long standing humanitarian tradition and role in seeking to advocate for and enhance a spirit of community cohesion and togetherness.

At the same time, the Leader advised he was aware of the anxieties which had been highlighted and assured the petitioners that these were not being ignored with him shortly due to meet representatives of Jewish community groups and the opportunity also extended to meet with representatives of the petition group.

In terms of the actual twinning arrangements, it was confirmed that the Council had been in dialogue with those responsible for the governance of Nablus, following receipt of the petition, in order to address and seek a response on the concerns identified, with the twinning arrangement also subject (as had been detailed in the original report) to a live and continuous equalities impact assessment. Petitioners were reminded that the arrangements would also be subject to the new International Partnering Protocol introduced in order to set clear expectations for any twinning process and included safeguards to ensure that no link would undermine cohesion or Brent's values as a borough. It was pointed out that the Protocol would also allow for any arrangement to be reviewed (and where necessary annulled) if it was assessed as failing to promote peace, understanding, and constructive exchange.

The petitioners were also reminded that other cities across the UK, such as Dundee and Sheffield, had already been able to establish successful ties with Nablus, in the same spirit of cultural bridge-building and mutual learning as proposed within Brent's arrangement with the ultimate aim being to build relationships that would support and not divide and that process being led by the Brent-Nablus Twinning Association.

In highlighting the need to recognise the development of each twinning arrangement as an ongoing process, the arrangements involving Nablus were acknowledged as representing the start of the conversation with Leader once again recognising the level of diversity as one of the borough's greatest strengths. In ending he also felt it important to reflect on Brent's proud tradition as a place where different communities were able to live and thrive side-by-side in peace, which he advised he was committed to ensure continued as part of the wider role in promoting peace and community wellbeing on an increasingly complex world stage.

Having thanked Ian Collier for presenting the petition and all those in attendance for the item as well as Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) for his response the Mayor then moved on to deal with the next petition.

(2) Save East Lane Theatre

The Mayor then welcomed Sue O'Connell to present the second petition, seeking support for the campaign to save the East Lane Theatre Club (ELTC). In thanking the Mayor for the opportunity to present the petition, Sue O'Connell began by highlighting that the petition had been signed by over 1,700 residents from across Brent and the surrounding area recognising that ELTC had been operating in Wembley since 1936 and on its current site in Vale Farm since the 1960's when the Club had entered into a lease to secure use of the original tennis pavilion. Following plans to demolish the Elms Hall venue in 1988, the Club decided to build their own venue as a 75-seat theatre with associated dressing rooms and audience areas.

Referring to a document circulated in advance of the meeting, containing additional information in support of the petition, Sue O'Connell highlighted the plan detailing the current location of the theatre and nature of land occupied, which she advised included restricted access given the proximity to Vale Farm Sports Centre and Wembley Football Club. Those in support of the petition were also keen to highlight that East Lane Theatre Club remained the only purpose-built amateur theatre in the Borough delivering a wide range of performances with the Club, now operating as a charity, run by volunteers and open to anyone offering the ability to develop a wide range of skills.

Highlighting the support for the Theatre from its loyal and increasingly diverse audience, the petitioners were also keen to remind members that the Club had never been in receipt of any subsidies from the Council, with all funding generated through ticket sales, membership fees and donations. Concern was also expressed that whilst their lease had expired in 2022 the Club had not heard from the Council, prompting them to approach officers regarding renewal of the lease with initial negotiations having been based on a proposed rent of £2,300 pa. The Club had therefore been surprised when (during these negotiations) they had received a Section 25 notice, including a proposed rent of £75,000 pa. Sue O'Connell advised that this change in position had created significant concern amongst the ELTC membership, who had subsequently contacted the Leader of the Council and been urged to continue negotiations with officers. Despite requests being submitted, the evidence used as the basis for the revised valuation had not been provided to the Club or their Chartered Surveyor. Whilst acknowledging that the original demand had subsequently been reduced from £75,000 to £25,000 (following appointment of a second surveyor) and then reduced again in June to £5,000 it was highlighted this still reflected a significant increase from the current rent being paid, with the Council also having declined to extend the Section 25 notice period to enable further negotiation and consideration of the offer. As a result, the Club had felt they had no option other than to instigate legal proceedings in an effort to protect their position and require the Council to justify the basis of the differing valuations provided.

Concern was also expressed by the petitioners that the latest offer had included the condition for an additional use of the site as a nursery, which it was felt the current building would be unsuitable to provide given the additional safeguarding

requirements that would need to be fulfilled meaning the Theatre, in its current form, would cease to exist.

Whilst understanding that the Council needed to ensure maximum gain from its property portfolio, the petitioners expressed concern that the new Property Strategy appeared to work against small community groups such as the Theatre given the difficulty they faced in being able to achieve commercial returns despite being recognised as providing useful community or cultural services. Given the focus on Brent as a borough of culture, it was felt the Strategy needed to consider each property on the basis of the individual benefits provided, with it highlighted, as an example, that other Council's (such as Barnet) were actively supporting amateur theatre groups through Community Benefit Schemes rather than seeking to price them out, as the petitions felt the current position adopted by Brent appeared to be doing.

In concluding presentation of the petition, Sue O'Connell therefore advised that the petitioners were asking the Council to seek a proper negotiated settlement through a process of dialogue, rather than legal proceedings, taking account of the Theatre's community cultural value and on the basis of realistic terms and a rental value that could be afforded by the Club.

The Mayor thanked Sue O'Connell for presenting the petition and then invited Councillor Benea (as Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Property) to respond.

In response, Councillor Benea began by thanking the petitioners for their defence of East Lane Theatre, recognising the depth of feeling and support which had been highlighted and also the long standing contribution made by the Theatre in terms of the community offer available to all those who used it.

Whilst keen to highlight the value placed on the cultural sector by the Council and commitment towards growing the borough's cultural offer, the need to recognise and balance this against the financial challenges and pressures faced not only by Brent but many other Council's was also highlighted as a key consideration given the ongoing impact of the previous governments programme of austerity (including the loss by the Council of over £200m in funding).

As a result, Councillor Benea acknowledged this had led the Council to having to make a number of difficult choices involving a balance between keeping services running, housing families in need, and maintaining their assets. Referring specifically to the building occupied by East Lane Theatre, it was recognised that this has been leased for over 30 years at a rate of just £1,500 per annum or less but that the original legally binding lease had now expired. Officers had therefore been required to review the property as part of the Council's borough-wide Property Strategy (which it was pointed out applied to all community assets) with a view to discussing a new rent that reflected the current realities and Council's legal duty to ensure best value for public property.

Whilst aware of the concern highlighted by the Theatre and appreciating the strength of feeling which had been expressed, Councillor Benea felt it important to make clear in response that the Council's position was not aimed at pricing or pushing community groups out but instead reflected a desire to work with

organisations in order to ensure their sustainability in a new financial reality. As a result, the Theatre was encouraged to continue actively engaging with officers in order to explore available options and the different potential pathways available, including partnership, phased arrangements, or external fundraising support in as collaborative a way as possible.

In ending her response, Councillor Benea assured the petitioners that whilst no decision was taken lightly by the council there was also a need to protect the Council's financial position and public money. This approach had, however, also been designed to reflect the Council's ongoing commitment to supporting grassroots arts, which it was pointed out had included East Lane Theatre benefitting from a lease over many years that had shielded it from the rising cost of property in London. Despite the financial constraints faced, Councillor Benea advised the Council would continue to act in a way that was fair and sustainable for all with the petitioners and volunteers therefore urged to continue working and talking to the Council in order to address the issues highlighted.

Having thanked Sue O'Connell for presenting the petition as well as Councillor Benea for her response, the Mayor then moved on to deal with the third and final petition.

(3) Save Barham Park

As the final petition, the Mayor then invited Councillor Paul Lorber (representing Friends of Barham Park) to present a petition containing 530 signatures opposing the proposed modification and discharge of the restrictive covenants on the site of 776-778 Harrow Road and seeking to prevent development and protect the future use of Barham Park.

In presenting the petition, Councillor Lorber began by expressing his support for the East Lane Theatre Club given his previous involvement as a volunteer and involvement of his ex-wife as a former secretary, for which he also took the opportunity to declare a personal interest. Taking a moment to reflect on the issues raised during presentation of the previous petition he felt these were similar to those faced by other voluntary and community sector organisations across the borough including the Barham Park Community Library which he represented as a trustee and founding member. Highlighting what he felt was the difference in approach between how other Community Libraries were treated, reference was made to what Councillor Lorber felt was the selective way market rental charges were being applied (using the example of Preston Community Library) despite introduction of the Property Strategy highlighting the need for a consistent approach across different organisations.

Moving on to address the issues within the petition relating to Barham Park, Councillor Lorber advised he was speaking as a representative of the Friends of Barham Park to highlight the disappointment expressed by a significant number of local residents and park users at the recent decision taken by the Barham Park Trust Committee to modify and discharge the restrictive covenants restricting development on the site at 776-778 Harrow Road. Despite the site having been sold, he felt the meaning of the original covenant put in place by the Trust Committee when the site was disposed of in seeking to restrict future development of the site would have been clear and accepted by the owner at the time of

purchase. On this basis, he felt that the decision by the current Trustees to modify and discharge the restrictive covenant in exchange for funds went against the original aim in seeking to protect the whole Park for the benefit of local people.

Concerns were also raised regarding what he felt to be the mismanagement of Barham Park as an asset by the current Trust Committee with reference made, as examples, to the recharging of funding incurred in relation to consultant fees in support of development of the Strategic Property Review to the Trust rather than Council alongside concerns raised about the effective use of other funding.

In outlining the support for the Park expressed by the petitioners and number of volunteers who were actively involved in maintaining the Park as a valued community asset, Councillor Lorber ended by highlighting the support being sought in seeking to protect Barham Park with the Council and Trust Committee urged to listen and take account of the views expressed.

At this stage in proceedings Councillor Kelcher in raising a Point of Order, sought clarification of the basis on which Councillor Lorber had presented the petition given, he felt, this had been designed as a process to allow members of the public rather than councillors (who already had an opportunity to participate during the meeting) to raise issues of local concern.

In response, Marsha Henry (Director of Law), whilst recognising Councillor Lorber's role as a councillor, advised that he had been recognised as a representative of the Friends of Barham Park in presenting the petition.

Having addressed the Point of Order, the Mayor thanked Councillor Lorber for presenting the petition and then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt (in his role as Chair of the Barham Park Trust Committee) to respond.

In response, Councillor Muhammed Butt started by outlining the Council's and Trust's pride in having Barham Park as an asset within the borough given its status as a much valued green space and as part of the borough's heritage. In terms of the petition, however, he felt its relevance in seeking to protect and secure the Park's future needed to be queried based on the issues highlighted and way in which it was felt facts had been misrepresented in its presentation. In terms of the current position, the opportunity was taken to clarify that at the time the site at 776 & 778 Harrow Road was sold (in 2011) the cottages located there were no longer in use for park staff with the properties identified as no longer providing any direct benefit to park users or providing a viable operational reason to retain them. This was felt to provide an important context, with the restrictive covenant (which formed the basis of the concerns raised within the petition) having been introduced in 2011 at the point of sale, once the buildings had consciously been taken out of park use and disposed off to raise funds for the Park.

As a result, Councillor Muhammed Butt felt it was possible to question the basis of the petition in seeking to protect green space given that no part of the open space in Barham Park was under threat and with the cottage buildings at the point of sale in 2011 being in private ownership and no longer part of Barham Park Estate. In highlighting that the current development proposals, which the modification and discharge of the restrictive covenants had been designed to enable, only impacted on the two residential properties contained within the site at the edge of the Park

and outside of the boundary used by the public, the value in terms of generating vital funding for the Trust in support of maintaining the wider Park as an asset was also highlighted as a key consideration. The decision which had been taken was also felt to reflect the difference in approach between the Administration and Liberal Democrats Group towards development, with the reference within the petition to honouring the original legacy left by Titus Barham in gifting the Park to the borough felt to be best represented through the generation of the additional income secured through the modification and discharge of the restrictive covenant in a way that would support the ongoing future of the Park rather than sticking with the status quo.

In highlighting that the decision taken by the Trust involved a legal and reasonable modification to a restriction no longer felt to serve the public interest he assured the petitioners that the decision made by the Trustees had been designed to ensure Barham Park was able to survive and continue thriving in serving the significant number of local residents who used and enjoyed the Park on a daily basis.

In ending his response, Councillor Muhammed Butt advised that whilst the Trustees remained committed to listening to views and concerns regarding future use of the Barham Park Estate and engaging with tenants and Park users, there was also a need to recognise the funding required to support its ongoing maintenance and use with the Trust therefore continuing to explore all avenues to support this process and the future of the Park.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Muhammed Butt for his response and having once again thanked everyone of their contributions advised that as this had been the final petition for presentation he would now move on to deal with the remainder of the agenda.

10. Motions

Before moving on to consider the motions listed on the summons, the Mayor advised members that a total of 40 minutes had been set aside for consideration of the four motions submitted for debate, based on an initial allocation of 10 minutes per motion. Should the time taken to consider the first motion be less than 10 minutes he advised that the remaining time available would be rolled forward for consideration of the remaining motions.

10.1 1st Motion (Conservative Group) – Protecting Equality and Community Cohesion in Brent's International Partnerships

The Mayor invited Councillor Kansagra to move the first motion, which had been submitted on behalf of the Conservative Group. Councillor Kansagra began by acknowledging the decision already taken by the Council to enter into a twinning partnership with Nablus, and advised members that the motion being moved was focused on ensuring all international partnerships undertaken by the Council followed a consistent, fair and inclusive process with community cohesion at the heart. Highlighting the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment that had been conducted ahead of the Nablus twinning decision, Councillor Kansagra felt it had raised legitimate concerns that the partnership had the potential to cause emotional harm to some Brent communities, may risk compounding antisemitism and could be viewed as favouring one group over another. He also felt that it was not clear what

steps would be taken to mitigate the identified risks, with residents in Brent raising questions around why the Council was committing time and resource to a town that Foreign Office guidance had currently placed a travel advisory against travelling to. In view of concerns relating to the consultation and engagement process, Councillor Kansagra in concluding his remarks, commended the motion as a way forward to ensure a consistent, transparent and inclusive framework for all future twinning subject to consultation and community engagement.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Kansagra for moving the motion and then drew members attention to an amendment submitted by Councillor Muhammed Butt on behalf of the Labour Group, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

In moving the amendment, Councillor Muhammed Butt began by advising that the response he had provided to the petition regarding twinning with Nablus had been intended to provide clarity on the Council's approach and once again reassured the chamber that all twinning arrangements the Council approved would be subject to a live, continuous equalities impact assessment, as outlined in the original report approved by Council. In addressing the proposed motion, he highlighted that community cohesion and values were at the forefront of the twinning approach with relationships built to foster understanding, and not to divide. Councillor Muhammed Butt also highlighted his pride at Brent being one of the most diverse boroughs in the country where people came to build a life and were able to live in peace alongside each other. Whilst acknowledging the complexity associated with any partnering arrangements he felt the amendment, as moved, would help to clarify the Council's position in terms of seeking to build understanding in taking the arrangements forward. On this basis the amendment moved by Councillor Butt was as follows:

To add the wording underlined and delete the wording indicated:

Protecting Equality and Community Cohesion in Brent's International Partnerships.

This Council notes

- Brent is proudly one of the most diverse boroughs in the country, home to communities of several faiths, ethnicities and backgrounds. People from across the globe are drawn to Brent, making it their home for work, family and the chance to build a safer life.
- The ongoing importance of ensuring all Council decisions, particularly international partnerships, uphold values of equity, and inclusion, ~~and political neutrality.~~
- The Council's decision to twin with Nablus has ~~caused division~~ triggered welcome conversation about Brent Council's ongoing plan to build new international relationships with cities and towns across the world borough.
- ~~The Equalities Impact Assessment provided as part of the decision to enter a twinning arrangement with Nablus stated the twinning 'may cause emotional harm to some groups in Brent' and 'may risk compounding antisemitism',~~

~~while also suggesting rejecting the partnership 'may be viewed as Islamophobic'.~~

- As part of the ongoing process relating to entering the twinning arrangements with Nablus, the Council will continuously update the completed equality impact assessment and, as part of that ongoing assessment the Council will routinely engage with community groups for feedback. ~~there was no meaningful engagement with key groups including Hindus, Christians, and the Jewish community on the community assessment or proposal prior to the decision.~~
- For now, ~~t~~The UK Foreign Office advises against all travel to all parts of the West Bank, ~~raising concerns about the safety and viability of a meaning that~~ our mutual exchange arrangement with Nablus will utilise different methods of engagement and hosting activities.

This Council believes:

- All twinning decisions must be guided by equalities compliance, transparency, and wide community support.
- There is a need for the Council to ensure that an equality impact assessment is undertaken to assess the impact of the activities proposed in the twinning arrangements on Brent residents and those with protected characteristics in order to safeguard the boroughs values. ~~Partnering with towns where access is unsafe for some Brent residents due to nationality, religion or sexual orientation contradicts our borough's values.~~
- ~~Solidarity and g~~ Global engagement are is important but must not override our duties under the Equality Act or risk harming community cohesion.

This Council resolves:

- (1) To continuously review and update the equalities impact assessment in relation to each individual twinning or friendship agreement ~~introduce a new Equalities Compliance Protocol for future international partnerships requiring:~~
 - A published Equalities Impact Assessment before ~~any vote~~ entering into any future twinning arrangements.
 - Engagement ~~Formal consultation~~ with Brent's major faith and community groups.
 - Assessment of safety and access for all protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation). ~~groups, including LGBTQ+ residents.~~
- (2) ~~To confirm that international partnerships should remain apolitical and avoid affiliation with any side in an ongoing foreign conflict.~~

- (3) To ~~request that Council~~ regularly reviews the International Partnering Protocol and framework, ensuring it is ~~including all current twinning arrangements, to ensure~~ in alignment with Brent's equality duties and community priorities.
- (4) To reaffirm support for partnerships reflecting shared values of democracy, inclusion and access for all residents.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Muhammed Butt for moving the amendment before inviting other members to speak, with the following contributions received.

In opening the debate Councillor Maurice advised that, whilst not against twinning in principle, he had concerns about twinning with towns that were recognised as unsafe for travel and highlighted the need to be able to fully embrace any twinning arrangement by being able to visit the area in order to positively engage. For this reason he advised he would be supporting the original motion as opposed to the amendment moved, and stressed the need to ensure consultation undertaken on any twinning arrangements was as wide as possible and not only focussed on specific groups.

At this stage, the Mayor advised that the time limit allocated for debate on the motion had been reached. In drawing the debate to a close, he therefore invited Councillor Kansagra (as mover of the original motion) followed by Councillor Muhammed Butt (as mover of the amendment) to exercise their right of reply.

In summing up, Councillor Kansagra thanked Councillor Muhammed Butt for his response to the petition and motion and endorsed the community engagement approach but advised he was not minded to accept the amendment moved on behalf of the Labour Group given the focus of the original motion in seeking to ensure the Council followed the new twinning protocol in terms of any arrangements moving forward.

Councillor Butt in closing the debate and exercising his right of reply on the amendment outlined how he felt this would enable the motion to be more reflective of the diverse communities across the borough and ensure any partnership or twinning arrangements was given the opportunity to thrive and succeed. He emphasised the ambition to ensure every community was recognised and their contributions were valued and, on this basis, hoped all members would support the amendment as moved.

Having thanked councillors for their contributions, the Mayor then moved to the vote on the motion starting with the amendment moved by the Labour Group.

The amendment, as set out above, was then put to the vote and declared **CARRIED**.

The Mayor then moved on to put the substantive motion, as amended, to a vote which was declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the following motion:

Protecting Equality and Community Cohesion in Brent's International Partnerships.

This Council notes:

- Brent is proudly one of the most diverse boroughs in the country, home to communities of several faiths, ethnicities and backgrounds. People from across the globe are drawn to Brent, making it their home for work, family and the chance to build a safer life.
- The ongoing importance of ensuring all Council decisions, particularly international partnerships, uphold values of equity, and inclusion.
- The Council's decision to twin with Nablus has triggered welcome conversation about Brent Council's ongoing plan to build new international relationships with cities and towns across the world.
- As part of the ongoing process relating to entering the twinning arrangements with Nablus, the Council will continuously update the completed equality impact assessment and, as part of that ongoing assessment the Council will routinely engage with community groups for feedback.
- For now, the UK Foreign Office advises against all travel to all parts of the West Bank, meaning that our mutual exchange arrangement with Nablus will utilise different methods of engagement and hosting activities.

This Council believes:

- All twinning decisions must be guided by equalities compliance, transparency, and wide community support.
- There is a need for the Council to ensure that an equality impact assessment is undertaken to assess the impact of the activities proposed in the twinning arrangements on Brent residents and those with protected characteristics in order to safeguard the boroughs values.
- Global engagement is important but must not override our duties under the Equality Act or risk harming community cohesion.

This Council resolves:

- (1) To continuously review and update the equalities impact assessment in relation to each individual twinning or friendship agreement, requiring:
 - A published Equalities Impact Assessment before entering into any future twinning arrangements.
 - Engagement with Brent's major faith and community groups.
 - Assessment of safety and access for all protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership,

pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation).

- (2) To regularly reviews the International Partnering Protocol and framework, ensuring it is in alignment with Brent's equality duties and community priorities.
- (3) To reaffirm support for partnerships reflecting shared values of democracy, inclusion and access for all residents.

10.2 2nd Motion (Liberal Democrats Group) – Stop messing up Brent

The Mayor then invited Councillor Clinton to move the second motion, which had been submitted on behalf of the Liberal Democrats Group. As context for the motion, Councillor Clinton began by expressing concern that the 'Don't Mess with Brent' campaign, which was being run alongside the Public Space Protection Orders, 'Fix my Street' and nuisance reporting apps were not felt to be working as they should. Speaking in support of the motion, he highlighted concerns that streets across Brent were not clean and anti-social behaviour (ASB) was worsening, with the 'fix my street' app now working as what he felt to be an 'on demand' rubbish clearance service and those reporting ASB seeing no meaningful action or response.

In proposing a way forward, Councillor Clinton whilst supporting the need highlighted by the Council for residents to take ownership and responsibility felt that the Council also needed to acknowledge its own difficulties and challenges in tackling the problem with specific reference to the reduction in street collections, introduction of the complex blue bag recycling system, HMOs not being provided with sufficient bins and enforcement failing to tackle late night nuisance and ASB. As a result, he advised the motion being moved on behalf of the Liberal Democrats Group was seeking to identify solutions that had been proven to work in other boroughs and included proposed funding streams including NCIL and the proposed introduction of a tourist levy, which he hoped all members would recognise and support.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Clinton for moving the motion and then drew members' attention to an amendment submitted by Councillor Jayanti Patel on behalf of the Conservative Group, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

In moving the amendment, Councillor Jayanti Patel began by welcoming the focus of the motion on the need to keep streets in Brent clean and tackling ASB. Concerns were, however, raised about the proposed introduction of a local tourist tax without relevant scrutiny and meaningful consultation with local residents and businesses. In outlining the amendment, he felt there was a need to recognise the potential impact any tax aimed at visitors may have in terms of the local economy, highlighting that other Councils who had introduced similar schemes had experienced mixed results, which he felt required the need for a more considered approach. The amendment moved by Councillor Jayanti Patel on behalf of the Conservative Group was therefore as follows:

To add the wording underlined and delete the wording indicated:

Stop Messing Up Brent

This Council notes:

- In 15 years, Labour-run Brent Council has contributed to the visible deterioration of our streets and public spaces through:
 - The blue bag fiasco.
 - Removing litter bins from our streets.
 - Reduced refuse collections.
 - Massive cost rises for the Too Big for the Bin Service.
- Labour-run Brent Council's failure to:
 - Meet the recycling targets in volumes and costs.
 - Ensure Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) have enough bins.
 - Tackle Chewing Tobacco spitting causing street cleaning & public health issue.
 - Tackle the rise in anti-social behaviour.
- Other Councils are taking creative steps to improve their local environment:
 - Kingston Council has piloted AI-powered cameras and achieved an 80% reduction in fly-tipping in targeted areas.
 - Manchester, Edinburgh, and Liverpool explored or implemented tourist taxes to raise funds for local services and public realm improvements.
- Liberal Democrats regularly raise these issues and call for action, but little effective action takes place.

This Council believes:

- Problems with fly-tipping, street mess, and anti-social behaviour are not isolated incidents, but the result of long-term neglect and poor decisions by the current administration. This neglect has created a vicious cycle - consistent with the "Broken Windows" theory, first applied in New York City, which demonstrated that visible signs of disorder encourage more disorder.
- Brent deserves better: residents expect and deserve clean, safe, and well-maintained neighbourhoods — and they are not getting it.

This Council resolves to:

- (1) Request that Cabinet consider the use of NCIL Funds to invest in:

- Reinstalling litter bins where needed most.
 - Ensuring that all HMOs have sufficient bin capacity and that landlords take responsibility for waste management.
 - Deploying AI-powered cameras in fly-tipping hotspots where cost-effective and supported by clear evidence.
- (2) Subject to meaningful consultation with residents and local businesses, and the outcome of an independent impact assessment confirming no adverse effect on local tourism or economic activity: consider the introduction of ~~Introduce~~ a local Tourist Tax with income ringfenced for enforcement to keep the streets clean and free of anti-social behaviour - increasing funding for street cleaning teams and enforcement officers.
- (3) Request that the Cabinet Member for Public Realm & Enforcement:
- (a) revise working hours of the Council's Enforcement Officers so they cover late night time shifts when dumping and anti-social activities take place.
 - (b) Give the choice of a wheelie bin in place of the blue bag as promised to Scrutiny prior to the introduction of the new recycling scheme.
- (4) Seek the introduction (subject to the necessary powers being identified) of planning/licensing requirements requiring all outlets with take aways service to provide recycling and litter bins outside their premises and take responsibility for daily emptying to keep the bin(s) and the area around them clean.
- (5) Introduce by-laws requiring outlet using or employing delivery drivers to take responsibility for their behaviour and a requirement that they cease to use them if they see them spitting or littering local streets or taking part in any form of anti-social behaviour including causing noise in residential areas late at night.
- (6) Call on the Government to implement a bottle and cans deposit scheme and pass on any surplus generated to local authorities to invest in improved litter management services.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Jayanti Patel for moving the amendment before inviting other members to speak, with the following contributions received.

In responding to the points raised, Councillor Krupa Sheth (as Cabinet Member for Public Realm & Enforcement) affirmed that the Council had been clear that nobody wanted to see litter or dumped waste on the streets of Brent, and highlighted that the problems outlined were not unique to Brent but faced by local authorities across the country who were challenged with rising costs and a history of cuts in funding. She highlighted that Brent now spent over two-thirds of its budget on protecting the most vulnerable through children's and adult's social care, which left significant funding gaps to deal with some of the issues raised through the motion. In highlighting that the Council was not standing still on those issues she felt it important to recognise the zero-tolerance approach being taken towards those

harming Brent's streets, providing examples of the increase in fines for fly-tipping, additional CCTV and enforcement officers and a continuation of the Community Skip scheme as ways the Council was making it easier to keep Brent's streets clean. In addition, Councillor Krupa Sheth outlined the actions being taken in relation to HMOs, paan spitting, and hoped all members would support the proposed introduction of a visitor levy due to be discussed later during the meeting on the basis of it providing the funding to do even more. In bringing her response to a close, she highlighted litter as a social justice issue given the more pronounced impact on deprived communities and emphasised that pride of place should not depend on someone's postcode with the Council continuing to do everything it could to keep Brent clean.

As a further contribution, Councillor Lorber (speaking in support of the original motion) reminded members that the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee had looked carefully at the proposals to introduce the blue bag recycling scheme and been advised of the proposed benefits in terms of potential increase in materials being recycled, which he felt was yet to be delivered. In addition, concerns were highlighted that despite funding being set aside the promise to consult with residents on the scheme following a trial period, did not appear to have taken place.

Councillor Maurice also took the opportunity to highlight concerns relating to the current opening hours of the recycling centre in Abbey Road, which he felt made it more difficult for residents to recycle.

As a final contribution to the debate, Councillor Matin (also speaking in support of the original motion) detailed her personal experience in using a local park with her guide dog, highlighting concerns regarding the level of broken glass, cans, bottles, food and even used syringes she had experienced. As such, she commended the sentiment and proposals within the original motion.

At this stage, the Mayor advised that the time limit allocated for debate on the motion had been reached. In drawing the debate to a close, he therefore invited Councillor Clinton (as mover of the original motion) followed by Councillor Mistry (speaking on behalf of the Conservative Group as mover of the amendment) to exercise their right of reply.

In summing up, Councillor Clinton advised he would be willing to accept the amendment put forward by the Conservative Group and raised concerns regarding the level of unallocated CIL funds held the Council, which he advised the Liberal Democrats Group had felt could be used to fund some of the solutions listed in the motion. As such he commended the proposals within motion to all members.

Councillor Mistry in closing the debate and exercising the right of reply on the amendment, highlighted the Conservatives Groups support for the principles set out within the motion with the need highlighted for urgent action to address issues being regularly reported through the Fix my Street app.

Having thanked councillors for their contributions, the Mayor then moved to the vote on the motion starting with the amendment moved by the Conservative Group.

The amendment, as set out above, was then put to the vote and declared **LOST**.

The Mayor then moved on to put the substantive motion, as originally moved, to a vote which was declared **LOST**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to reject the following motion:

Stop Messing Up Brent

This Council notes:

- In 15 years, Labour-run Brent Council has contributed to the visible deterioration of our streets and public spaces through:
 - The blue bag fiasco.
 - Removing litter bins from our streets.
 - Reduced refuse collections.
 - Massive cost rises for the Too Big for the Bin Service.
- Labour-run Brent Council's failure to:
 - Meet the recycling targets in volumes and costs.
 - Ensure Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) have enough bins.
 - Tackle Chewing Tobacco spitting causing street cleaning & public health issue.
 - Tackle the rise in anti-social behaviour.
- Other Councils are taking creative steps to improve their local environment:
 - Kingston Council has piloted AI-powered cameras and achieved an 80% reduction in fly-tipping in targeted areas.
 - Manchester, Edinburgh, and Liverpool explored or implemented tourist taxes to raise funds for local services and public realm improvements.
- Liberal Democrats regularly raise these issues and call for action, but little effective action takes place.

This Council believes:

- Problems with fly-tipping, street mess, and anti-social behaviour are not isolated incidents, but the result of long-term neglect and poor decisions by the current administration. This neglect has created a vicious cycle - consistent with the "Broken Windows" theory, first applied in New York City, which demonstrated that visible signs of disorder encourage more disorder.

- Brent deserves better: residents expect and deserve clean, safe, and well-maintained neighbourhoods — and they are not getting it.

This Council resolves to:

- (1) Request that Cabinet consider the use of NCIL Funds to invest in:
 - Reinstalling litter bins where needed most.
 - Ensuring that all HMOs have sufficient bin capacity and that landlords take responsibility for waste management.
 - Deploying AI-powered cameras in fly-tipping hotspots.
- (2) Introduce a local Tourist Tax with income ringfenced for enforcement to keep the streets clean and free of anti-social behaviour - increasing funding for street cleaning teams and enforcement officers.
- (3) Request that the Cabinet Member for Public Realm & Enforcement:
 - (a) Revise working hours of the Council's Enforcement Officers so they cover late night time shifts when dumping and anti-social activities take place.
 - (b) Give the choice of a wheelie bin in place of the blue bag as promised to Scrutiny prior to the introduction of the new recycling scheme.
- (4) Seek the introduction (subject to the necessary powers being identified) of planning/licensing requirements requiring all outlets with take aways service to provide recycling and litter bins outside their premises and take responsibility for daily emptying to keep the bin(s) and the area around them clean.
- (5) Introduce by-laws requiring outlet using or employing delivery drivers to take responsibility for their behaviour and a requirement that they cease to use them if they see them spitting or littering local streets or taking part in any form of anti-social behaviour including causing noise in residential areas late at night.
- (6) Call on the Government to implement a bottle and cans deposit scheme and pass on any surplus generated to local authorities to invest in improved litter management services.

10.3 3rd Motion (Labour Group) – Tackling Smartphone Use to Improve Outcomes for Brent's Children

The Mayor then invited Councillor Begum to move the first motion submitted by the Labour Group. In moving the motion, Councillor Begum began by highlighting the way she felt the motion would resonate with many, particularly parents, who were witnessing how smartphones were a part of almost every moment of a child's life whilst they were still developing mentally, physically and emotionally. She acknowledged that smartphones were not designed with children in mind but appeared to have reshaped childhood rapidly, with almost 90% of 12-year-olds in

the UK owning a smartphone and 25% of 6-year-olds with the average time spent by UK teenagers on their smartphones having been assessed as 35 hours per week impacting on other opportunities to socialise.

Other concerns raised including the potential for smartphones to cause conflict in the home alongside the level of bullying being reported by young people involving the use of a device with a continual process of catch up by parents in terms of the developing technology.

Referring to action already being taken within Brent, Councillor Begum highlighted that many schools had already taken steps to limit excessive smartphone use, with data showing that children at smartphone-free schools were achieving higher outcomes in relation to average GCSE results. Recognising the inconsistency in the application of this approach, however, she advised that the motion was advocating for a more joined-up approach between schools, parents, community organisations and the local authority that informed and educated parents, empowered teachers and protected children from the harms of excessive screentime. In commending the motion to members she felt it important to end by clarifying that the motion was not seeking a complete ban on smartphone use in schools but endorsing an approach encouraging action to be taken where necessary, in order to deliver the best start in life for Brent's children.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Begum for moving the motion before inviting other members to speak, with the following contributions received.

Speaking in support of the motion, Councillor Clinton opened the debate by highlighting the recent discussion on the topic of smartphones and online safety at the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and advocated for a continual focus on this to protect children in the evolving digital sphere.

In recognising and supporting the concerns highlighted within the motion, Councillor Hirani agreed schools should have the power to control use of smartphones in schooltime and recognised the impact of cyber bullying on children's mental health. At the same time, however, concerns were raised regarding the funding of the proposals given existing pressures on school budgets which she felt would also need to be address in seeking to take the proposed action forward.

As a further contribution, Councillor Mistry also highlighted her support for the motion whilst referring to previous attempts to introduce similar measure by the previous Conservative Government which had been blocked by the Labour Party when in opposition. She also advocated for decisions on smartphone bans to remain with school heads and governors as individual schools would have different requirements.

In supporting the motion, Councillor Tatler also welcomed the proposals in her role as both a parent and former teacher. Highlighting that many schools already had the power to restrict the use of smartphones, she welcomed the fact that the motion went further by also seeking to empower parents to support children in the responsible use of smartphones.

At this stage, as the time limit for debate had been reached, the Mayor then invited Councillor Begum to exercise her right of reply. Councillor Begum advised that she

wished to provide Councillor Grahl (as Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools) with the opportunity to speak on her behalf in exercising the right of reply. Following a Point of Order raised by Councillor Lorber on this process, a procedural motion was moved by Councillor Nerva seeking to suspend Standing Order 41 & 42 in relation to motions and the conduct of debates at Council meetings to enable Councillor Grahl to exercise the right of reply on the debate. In accordance with Standing Order 42 (d) the procedural motion was put to the vote without further discussion and declared **CARRIED**.

The Mayor then invited Councillor Grahl to exercise the right of reply and close the debate on the motion. In thanking Councillor Begum for bringing forward the motion and for her commitment to addressing the issue, Councillor Grahl highlighted the contact with parents, teachers and young people supporting the concerns raised in terms of the impact from excessive use of smartphones and the dangers posed on the academic and emotional development of children and young people, with data showing a direct relationship between screentime and anxiety, depression, eating disorders and cyber bullying. In considering how Brent was responding, she commended the action already being taken but agreed there was more that could be done, given the inconsistency in smartphone policies across schools creating a patchwork of vulnerabilities that needed to be addressed. In advocating and supporting the need for a more joined-up approach that included schools, parents, community organisations, trade unions and mental health experts she highlighted her support for the approach towards creation of a borough-wide strategy that aimed to inform and educate whilst empowering teachers and safeguarding Brent's children and affirmed that the Council would seek to draw on the learnings and best practice from other local authorities to find an approach that could be tailored to Brent. On this basis she hoped all members would join her in support of the motion moved.

Having thanked all members for their contributions, the Mayor then moved to put the motion to a vote which was declared unanimously **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the following 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.

10.4 4th Motion (Labour Group) – Protecting the working rights of delivery riders and the safety of pedestrians in Brent

Prior to undertaking the debate on the fourth and final motion, Councillor Kansagra raised a Point of Order regarding the overall time allocated for the debate on motions, which he highlighted had left only 5 minutes to consider the final motion. Having sought advice from the Chief Executive and Director of Law it was therefore agreed to extend the time available to complete consideration of the motions by an additional 5 minutes.

The Mayor then invited Councillor Ethapemi to move the second and final motion submitted by the Labour Group. In moving the motion, Councillor Ethapemi began by outlining the purpose of the motion which he advised was aimed at improving the working rights of delivery riders as well as recognising the importance of and protecting the safety of pedestrians in Brent. Highlighting the rapidly changing nature of the delivery and gig economy, he raised concerns about the fragmented way of working for many delivery drivers and riders. In raising these concerns, he highlighted that many were poorly paid, lacked basic protections and were often mislabelled as self-employed to deny them fundamental workers' rights such as sick or holiday pay. He highlighted growing public concern over the platforms in use, including inadequate screening of candidates, account sharing, and dangerous use of e-bikes which posed serious safeguarding risks for both workers and residents.

In raising awareness of the issues, he felt this was a symptom of the economic failure experienced during the previous Conservative government where deregulation and low-paid work had been allowed to continue but was pleased to support Labour's New Deal for Working People in backing change to labour laws and working with trade unions and businesses to deliver partnerships based on mutual respect, cooperation and negotiation. As an example the opportunity was taken to commend GMBs agreement with Deliveroo which brought workers one step closer to fair and secure work, but highlighted the need for more to be done, including is seeking a safer public realm and on this basis commended the motion to members.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Ethapemi for moving the motion before inviting other members to speak, with the following contributions received.

In opening the debate, Councillor Chan (speaking in support of the motion) highlighted the many contributions towards a functioning of society, including local democracy, civic participation, volunteering, faith settings and libraries which were all identified as key elements binding communities and society together. He added that, for himself and many colleagues, another part of that process were trade unions with their key role in supporting and protecting workers rights. He felt that by passing the motion, the Council would therefore help to shine a light on otherwise isolated workers in order to grant them more security, dignity and respect.

The Mayor then then drew members attention to an amendment submitted by Councillor Maurice on behalf of the Conservative Group, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

In moving the amendment, Councillor Maurice began by welcoming the focus on improved safety and tackling illegal working practices as well as ensuring streets remained safe for residents and those working in the gig economy. Whilst recognising that the motion addressed some key and complex issues, he advised that the Conservative Group did not support what they felt to be an attempt to frame these on previous Government policy highlighting that many chose to work in the gig economy because of the freedom and flexibility it offered and therefore a more balanced approach was needed. In recognising and supporting the need for stronger protection for workers and residents in terms of their rights, road safety and preventing criminal activity he felt this also required stronger enforcement, education and targeted action. As a result, he advised the amendment had been designed to retain the objective of the original motion whilst removing what he felt to be the overly party political focus with the amendment moved therefore as follows:

To add the wording underlined and delete the wording indicated:

Protecting the working rights of delivery riders and the safety of pedestrians in Brent

This Council notes:

- Delivery drivers and riders are an essential part of Brent's local economy, enabling thousands of residents to access food, groceries, and services. Yet, for too many of these workers, their employment is precarious, poorly paid and lacking basic protections. They are often classified as 'self-employed', leaving them without sick pay, holiday pay, or security.
- The growth of the gig economy reflects changing consumer habits and a desire among many workers for flexible, app-based income opportunities. ~~However stronger safeguards are needed to prevent abuse and ensure public safety. years of Conservative economic failure. Fourteen years of austerity, deregulation, and weak enforcement have allowed insecure, low-paid work to flourish.~~
- Research by the TUC shows three in 20 working adults now work via gig platforms at least weekly, compared to just one in 20 in 2016. For many drivers and riders, this insecurity is compounded by rising costs of living, long hours, and growing safety risks on London's busy roads.
- While some workers value flexibility, independent research by the Social Market Foundation confirms that 91% of gig economy delivery workers also want stronger rights and protections.
- The rising public concern over poor screening practices by gig economy platforms. Allegations of account sharing, subcontracting, and weak identity checks raise serious safeguarding risks for both workers and residents in Brent.

- That riders working illegally or through borrowed accounts are at heightened risk of exploitation, debt bondage, and coercion.
- Brent residents are raising concerns about poor riding behaviour by some delivery workers, including disregard for the Highway Code, riding on pavements, and dangerous use of e-motorbikes.

This Council welcomes:

- The GMB Union's ground-breaking recognition agreement with Deliveroo, providing a voice for drivers on pay, guaranteed earnings, and dispute resolution.
- Brent Council's long-standing London Living Wage accreditation, ensuring directly employed and contracted staff are paid fairly.
- Brent's programmes such as Brent Works, that help residents access good quality, secure employment outside the gig economy.
- The Government's recently introduced Employment Rights Bill as a step towards predictable working requests, improved redundancy protections for pregnant employees, flexible working rights, and unpaid carers' leave.

This Council resolves to:

- (1) Write to major delivery platforms operating in Brent – including Deliveroo, Uber Eats, Just Eat, Getir, Gopuff and others – urging them to:
 - Become accredited London Living Wage employers;
 - Strengthen identity checks, screening, and enforcement to prevent account misuse and protect both workers and the public;
 - To close loopholes that allow account rentals, including through regular selfie checks, live ID systems, and tamper-proof verification;
 - Take action to improve rider conduct and compliance with road safety rules, including consequences for riders who breach the Highway Code.
- (2) Work with trade unions, migrant rights groups, and enforcement agencies to highlight and address the hidden exploitation within the gig economy, particularly around account renting and subcontracting.
- (3) Explore how Brent's transport, public realm, and road safety strategies can better support delivery workers, including safe rest spaces and secure cycle parking.
- (4) Request an update from the Lead Member on the modern slavery risks associated with illegal delivery work within Brent, and options for targeted safeguarding outreach.

At this stage, the Mayor advised that the additional time allocated for debate on the motion had been expired. In drawing the debate to a close, he therefore invited Councillor Ethapemi (as mover of the original motion) followed by Councillor Maurice (as mover of the amendment) to exercise their right of reply.

In summing up, Councillor Ethapemi advised that the essence of the motion had been about fairness and safety and he did not believe it to be overly political but in favour of safety, fairness and regulations for workers.

Councillor Maurice in closing the debate and exercising his right of reply on the amendment outlined additional concerns regarding the need to ensure the compliance of drivers (with a particular focus on learners) with the highway code. In once again highlighting the nature of the gig economy, he ended by once again advising that the focus of the amendment had been to address what he felt to be the unfair focus on the previous Conservative government within the original motion, with the main objective in terms of protection and support for workers and residents supported and the suggestion also made that the Council should consider engaging with insurance companies to ask them to refrain from issuing business insurance unless riders had passed their test.

Having thanked councillors for their contributions, the Mayor then moved to the vote on the motion starting with the amendment moved by the Conservative Group. The amendment, as set out above, was then put to the vote and declared **LOST**.

The Mayor then moved on to put the substantive unamended motion to a vote, which was declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the following motion:

Protecting the working rights of delivery riders and the safety of pedestrians in Brent

This Council notes:

- Delivery drivers and riders are an essential part of Brent's local economy, enabling thousands of residents to access food, groceries, and services. Yet, for too many of these workers, their employment is precarious, poorly paid and lacking basic protections. They are often classified as 'self-employed', leaving them without sick pay, holiday pay, or security.
- The growth of the gig economy reflects years of Conservative economic failure. Fourteen years of austerity, deregulation, and weak enforcement have allowed insecure, low-paid work to flourish.
- Research by the TUC shows three in 20 working adults now work via gig platforms at least weekly, compared to just one in 20 in 2016. For many drivers and riders, this insecurity is compounded by rising costs of living, long hours, and growing safety risks on London's busy roads.
- While some workers value flexibility, independent research by the Social Market Foundation confirms that 91% of gig economy delivery workers also want stronger rights and protections.

- The rising public concern over poor screening practices by gig economy platforms. Allegations of account sharing, subcontracting, and weak identity checks raise serious safeguarding risks for both workers and residents in Brent.
- That riders working illegally or through borrowed accounts are at heightened risk of exploitation, debt bondage, and coercion.
- Brent residents are raising concerns about poor riding behaviour by some delivery workers, including disregard for the Highway Code, riding on pavements, and dangerous use of e-motorbikes.

This Council welcomes:

- The GMB Union's ground-breaking recognition agreement with Deliveroo, providing a voice for drivers on pay, guaranteed earnings, and dispute resolution.
- Brent Council's long-standing London Living Wage accreditation, ensuring directly employed and contracted staff are paid fairly.
- Brent's programmes such as Brent Works, that help residents access good quality, secure employment outside the gig economy.
- The Government's recently introduced Employment Rights Bill as a step towards predictable working requests, improved redundancy protections for pregnant employees, flexible working rights, and unpaid carers' leave.

This Council resolves to:

- (1) Write to major delivery platforms operating in Brent – including Deliveroo, Uber Eats, Just Eat, Getir, Gopuff and others – urging them to:
 - Become accredited London Living Wage employers;
 - Strengthen identity checks, screening, and enforcement to prevent account misuse and protect both workers and the public;
 - To close loopholes that allow account rentals, including through regular selfie checks, live ID systems, and tamper-proof verification;
 - Take action to improve rider conduct and compliance with road safety rules, including consequences for riders who breach the Highway Code.
- (2) Work with trade unions, migrant rights groups, and enforcement agencies to highlight and address the hidden exploitation within the gig economy, particularly around account renting and subcontracting.
- (3) Explore how Brent's transport, public realm, and road safety strategies can better support delivery workers, including safe rest spaces and secure cycle parking.

- (4) Request an update from the Lead Member on the modern slavery risks associated with illegal delivery work within Brent, and options for targeted safeguarding outreach.

11. **Reports from the Leader and Cabinet**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader of the Council, to introduce the report updating members on the work being undertaken across each Cabinet portfolio in order to provide ongoing support and services to meet the needs of residents across the borough.

In congratulating Councillor Bajwa on his appointment as Deputy Mayor, Councillor Muhammed Butt began by thanking all members of the Cabinet for the work being undertaken across their portfolios to continue supporting and safeguarding local residents in line with the Council's core strategic priorities, recognising the ongoing nature of the financial pressures faced by the Council. In commending the work being undertaken to manage demand and address the pressures identified whilst also delivering on their commitments, members were assured that the need for continued financial discipline and careful stewardship (often involving difficult decisions) had also been recognised in order to sustain and ensure the Council's ongoing financial sustainability.

The opportunity was also taken to formally welcomed Councillor Promise Knight back following her return from Maternity Leave. As a result of the changes introduced to the Cabinet Portfolios earlier in the year, the Leader advised that Councillor Knight had been appointed as the newly established Cabinet Member for Customer Experience, Resident Support and Culture with Councillor Donnelly-Jackson continuing as Cabinet Member for Housing. The opportunity was also taken to thank Councillor Donnelly-Jackson for the work undertaken and support in covering Councillor Knight's portfolio, during her period of maternity leave.

As part of the update, members were also asked to note (as tabled at the meeting) the Executive decisions which had been taken under the Council's urgency procedures, since the previous update provided for the Council meeting in November 2024.

The Mayor thanked the Leader for the report and it was **RESOLVED** to formally note the update provided.

12. **Questions from the Opposition and other Non-Cabinet Members**

Before moving on to consider the questions submitted by non-Cabinet members, the Mayor reminded Members that a total of 30 minutes had been set aside for this item, which would begin with consideration of the written questions submitted in advance of the meeting along with any supplementary questions. Once these had been dealt with, the remaining time available would then be opened up for any other non-Cabinet members to question Cabinet Members (without the need for advance notice) on matters relating to their portfolio.

The Mayor advised that five written questions had been submitted in advance of the meeting for response by the relevant Cabinet Member and the written responses

circulated within the agenda were noted. The Mayor then invited supplementary questions on the responses provided:

- 12.1 Councillor Lesley Smith thanked Councillor Benea (as Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Property) for the written response regarding the Council's recent investment in the West London Orbital rail project and support for the Bakerloo Line upgrade and extension. In welcoming the Council's commitment to these schemes details were also sought, as a supplementary question, on the Council's position regarding support for the campaign to secure step free access at Queens Park Station given the significant passenger numbers using the station, including families and older members of the community.

In response, Councillor Benea in welcoming the support expressed for the Council's ongoing commitment towards West London Orbital and the Bakerloo Line extension given the importance of the economic, social and environmental benefits associated with their delivery, also highlighted her willingness to work with the campaign to secure step free access at Queens Park station. In referencing the support and investment provide by the Council, working in collaboration with TfL, to secure step free access at Alperton Station Councillor Benea expressed hope that similar improvements could be secured at Queen Parks and ended her response by once again reiterating her support for the lobbying efforts being undertaken by the local campaign.

- 12.2 Councillor Long thanked Councillor Krupa Sheth (as Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Enforcement) for the written response to her question seeking an update on the provision of parking bays for dockless e-bikes across the borough, ongoing work to hold e-bike operators to account for safety and operation of the scheme and measures to promote active travel. In referring to the management of dockless e-bikes and the promotion of cycling and sustainable travel in Brent, Councillor Long, highlighted particular concerns regarding pedestrian safety given the way in which dockless e-bikes were being unsafely left on the street and the ease with which they could be hacked. As a supplementary question, Councillor Long therefore sought details on the measures being pursued by the Council with Lime (as the scheme operator in Brent to address the concerns highlighted, particularly in relation to the problems being created through the hacking of their dockless e-bikes and whether any requirement could be included moving forward to ensure the bikes provided include anti-hacking measures.

In response, Councillor Krupa Sheth acknowledged the concerns raised by Councillor Long and assured members of the ongoing engagement between the Council and Lime (as the current dockless e-bike provider within the borough) in an attempt to address the concerns relating to the issues being created by the hacking of their bikes and to ensure the necessary preventative measures were introduced moving forward.

- 12.3 As Councillor Moeen had submitted her apologies for absence the written response to her original question regarding the provision of free school meals and pilot breakfast clubs was noted without any follow up supplementary question being raised.

- 12.4 In noting the written response provided to her question regarding the equality impact assessment relating to the town twinning arrangements with Nablus Councillor Mistry felt it important to clarify the issues raised did not relate to the twinning arrangement in principle but were instead focussed on whether the Council had fulfilled its obligations regarding assessments in relation to equality, impartiality, and the impact on community cohesion. As a supplementary question she therefore asked Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) to clarify (a) the steps being taken to mitigate the risks identified in the equality impact assessment supporting the twinning arrangement; (b) the basis of the decision made in seeking to pursue a partnership arrangement which excluded many of Brent residents, including sections of the LGBT+ and Jewish community; and (c) the perceived lack of consultation with key communities and steps being taken to verify the total number of signatures included as part of the petition supporting the original twinning arrangement. In summing up Councillor Mistry queried how a decision that had appeared to exclude many residents, divided the community, and raised serious equality concerns could be justified on the basis of creating unity and fostering community cohesion.

In response, Councillor Muhammed Butt began by referring to what he felt had been the comprehensive written response provided to the original question which were also felt to have covered the supplementary issues raised by Councillor Mistry. The opportunity was, though, also taken to once again emphasise Brent's commitment to protecting and serving all residents across the borough regardless of their beliefs, faith or background. In addressing the concerns raised in relation to the equality impact assessment he reminded members of the intention for this to be a continuous and live process designed to reflect any concerns and issues being raised and once again extended an offer to meet with anyone who had specific concerns (as he had done earlier during presentation of the petition opposing the twinning arrangements) to ensure all voices and opinions were heard. In ending his response, Councillor Muhammed Butt once again reiterated the commitment made to continue listening to Brent residents and doing everything possible to safeguard, protect, and serve all communities across the borough.

- 12.5 In thanking Councillor Benea for her written response to his question regarding the definition of shared ownership as an affordable housing model and delivery of shared housing units across the borough, Councillor Lorber began by highlighting what he felt was a need to review the accuracy of the data provided on the delivery of units by ward, with specific reference to the figures relating to Alperton. Reference was also made to issues recently highlight within a BBC report into the hidden costs and financial hardship increasingly being experienced by people who had purchased shared ownership units and, in view of the concerns, raised asked Councillor Benea, as a supplementary question, whether as a result Brent still, irrespective of the planning rules, defined "shared ownership" as an affordable housing model.

In response, Councillor Benea (as Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Property) felt it important to clarify that the Council was not responsible for the current definition of shared ownership as an affordable housing model which it was pointed out fell within the definition of an

affordable housing product within the National Planning Policy Framework and London Plan and which Brent's Local Plan was therefore consistent with. Whilst aware of the concerns raised, it was pointed out that the Council's emphasis remained on providing the maximum number of homes at social or London affordable rents of which shared ownership currently formed part of the overall picture. In terms of the issues raised relating to accuracy of the data provided, Councillor Benea ended her response by advising she would arrange for the figures provided to be reviewed and should any issues be identified come back to update Councillor Lorber.

Having thanked members for their written questions and Cabinet Members for the responses provided to the supplementary questions, the Mayor advised that he intended to move on with the remainder of time available being used for an open question time session to the Cabinet. Questions relating to the following issues were raised and responses provided, as set out below:

- (i) Following the Council's recent self-referral to the Regulator of Social Housing and subsequent C3 regulatory grading Councillor Jayanti Patel felt it had become clear that serious failings had occurred, particularly in relation to breaches in compliance with building safety standards and significant inaccuracies with the True Compliance system. This included 12,500 fire actions having been wrongly updated to indicate that works had been completed despite missing the required supporting evidence in addition to the council being unable to reconcile performance data on asbestos management, water safety and detectors for smoke and carbon monoxide.

Given the scale and seriousness of the issues identified he therefore asked for a clear assurance to be provided on the actions being taken to address the position and that a clear and that a transparent response would be provided, recognising this as vital in restoring public confidence in the Council's ability to safeguard its residents and comply with its regulatory obligations.

The Mayor advised that as this question would require a response from Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (as Cabinet Member for Housing) who had submitted her apologies for absence, a written response would be arranged following the meeting.

- (ii) Councillor Chan who in highlighting the condemnation being expressed by residents and businesses he represented in Harlesden & Kensal Green towards those responsible for fly-tipping and littering and welcoming the zero tolerance approach towards enforcement prescribed within the "Don't Mess with Brent" campaign, sought assurance on the feasibility and approach being adopted in seeking to increase the number of enforcement officers currently employed along with an extension in enforcement hours.

In response, Councillor Krupa Sheth (as Cabinet Member for Public Realm & Enforcement) advised of the measures already introduced to increase the level of enforcement activity and number of officer available supported by enhanced CCTV coverage. Night patrols were also confirmed to have been introduced during summer months with the Council continuing to explore how to increase shift coverage during enhanced periods of activity.

- (iii) In taking the opportunity to welcome Councillor Knight back from maternity leave, Councillor Kennelly took the opportunity to celebrate the opening of Preston Community Library with thanks expressed to the Residents Association for their support of the campaign along with officers for their hard work in delivery of the project. Highlighting the significant achievement in delivery of the scheme, Councillor Kennelly asked if this was recognised as evidence of the Council's effective collaboration with the Voluntary & Community Sector and what could be achieved through effective support of the sector.

In response, Councillor Knight (as Cabinet Member for Customer Experience, Resident Support and Culture) thanked Councillor Kennelly and colleagues for the warm welcome back and agreed that delivery of the scheme highlighted the importance of the strong relationship between the Council and Voluntary & Community Sector as well as the library service and volunteers involved in running community libraries, across the borough who were recognised as essential in ensuring local needs continued to be met.

- (iv) In referring to the Conservative Group alternative budget proposals which had been moved at the Budget Setting Council meeting in February 2025, Councillor Mistry sought further details on the progress being made in addressing concerns relating to the collection of Council Tax & Business Rate arrears as well as benefit overpayments. Citing a recent press article highlighting Brent's performance in relation to Council Tax collection, the recovery of arrears and debt collection, details were sought on the action being taken by the Council to address the concerns outlined in relation to performance and recovery of the level of arrears identified.

In response, Councillor Milli Patel (as Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources) assured members that the whilst the approach towards debt recovery was guided by the Council's ethical debt policy and aimed to support those residents genuinely experiencing financial hardship, the Council also remained focussed in taking robust action against those who had made a conscious decision not to pay.

- (v) Councillor Johnson in noting the increase in pupils awaiting an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) assessment and pressures being faced by school leadership teams across the borough sought details on the support being provided to schools in Brent in relation to the offer of Additional Resource Provision designed to meet the increasingly complex needs identified.

In response, Councillor Grahl (as Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools) felt it important to begin by outlining the Council's improved performance in processing EHCPs within required timescales with current performance having increased to 70%. Highlighting the Council's commitment to providing children with opportunities to learn in mainstream settings wherever possible, the importance of Additional Resource Provision was recognised with 69% of SEND children in Brent attending mainstream schools, and Brent's % aligning with the national average. Whilst providing investment to deliver a new SEN school in the borough other support measures being provided within mainstream schools included speech and

language therapy, classroom conversions for neurodiverse children, and modifications for hearing-impaired children. Councillor Grahl also took the opportunity to praise the response being provided by individual schools to the challenges and pressures identified and to remind members of the outcome from a recent Ofsted inspection which had recognised provision within Brent as ensuring SEND children received appropriate levels of support when required. Whilst acknowledging the pressures being created by the continuing increase in EHCP demand, Councillor Grahl ended by commending the progress being made in Brent in seeking to address the challenges identified to ensure every child had the best start in life.

- (vi) In expressing concern at the nature of recent opposition to the decision made to approve the twinning arrangement between the Council and Nablus, Councillor Afzal sought details on the Council's position regarding the tactics which he felt had been deployed in an attempt to derail and delay the twinning process, including what he claimed to be the spreading of fear and misinformation regarding the governance arrangements in Nablus and sought reassurance that Brent remained committed to the twinning arrangement and ensuring the views of those communities in support of the process were also recognised and heard. Referring to the petition presented earlier in the meeting opposing the twinning arrangements, he felt this contained inaccurate information about the political affiliations of Nablus's governing authority and that the engagement with Nablus residents would endanger Brent residents with concerns also raised, as a further example, that the petition opposing the arrangements had included the names of many councillors from a Muslim background without their consent.

In response, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) felt it important to recognise the stance taken by the Council in seeking to stand against division and any form of racism with an assurance provided of the Council's ongoing commitment to stand united against all forms of hatred and division in order to maintain Brent as one of the best examples of unity across London.

Regarding the concerns expressed in relation to the petition opposing the twinning arrangement with Nablus, confirmation was provided that officers had investigated the issues raised and identified some anomalies related to signatures having been added without apparent consent. These individuals had been contacted to verify whether they had submitted their names, and unverified names had subsequently been removed as signatories from the petition. This had prompted the Council to review the current verification system with proposals to review and implement a more secure and robust e-petition system moving forward. In ending his response, Councillor Muhammed Butt felt it was essential for everyone to work together to ensure that no individual seeking to divide the community be allowed to succeed, regardless of their background or origin.

- (vii) Supporting the concerns previously raised regarding the operation of the dockless e-bike scheme by Lime across the borough, Councillor Lorber sought details on the measures being taken to address the various issues highlighted and when it would be made clear to Lime that the operation of their scheme was not working as intended prior to consideration being given to

their removal. Whilst recognising some of the issues arising from irresponsible use it was felt these were exacerbated by the ease with which the bikes could be hacked and lack of dedicated parking bays with queries raised as to why the system of dockless bikes had been accepted when compared to other more successful schemes operating a docking system which were felt to encourage more responsible behaviour.

In response, Councillor Krupa Sheth (as Cabinet Member for Public Realm & Enforcement) advised that the issues raised had been recognised and raised with Lime in relation to their future operation across the borough. As part of the measures being introduced in response, parking bays were being introduced across the borough to encourage more responsible behaviour. Whilst keen to support and recognise the benefits in encouraging more active modes of travel she advised the Council remained committed to tackling the concerns highlighted with Lime in order to hold them to account for operation and management of the scheme. As part of this process reference was made to the recent public Forum held with Lime and commitment to hold further meetings, which it was hoped Councillor Lorber would seek to engage with moving forward.

- (viii) Referring to concerns previously raised at the Annual Council meeting, Councillor Kansagra once again took the opportunity to query the current arrangements for the chairing of the Council's Scrutiny Committee's given the impact which he felt the removal of the vice-chair roles from the Opposition Groups had had in undermining the independence and democratic accountability of the scrutiny function. Highlight a request made for these arrangements, along with the current level of Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) payable to members in certain roles (including those serving on Planning Committee) to be reviewed by the Constitutional Working Group (CWG) details were sought on any progress made.

In response, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) referred to the response he had provided at the same meeting regarding the need to recognise the democratic mandate of the current Administration, which he felt also covered member's participation in scrutiny and the wider democratic process highlighting the opportunities which were already available for members of the Opposition to fully participate and engage in the way scrutiny was being delivered. In response to the concerns identified in relation to SRAs he reminded members the current Members Allowance Scheme had been designed to ensure allowances remained in line with recommended percentage bands whilst also reflecting the scope and workload undertaken by members in their various roles. In confirming that he would have no objection to a further review of allowances being undertaken by CWG it was, however, pointed out this had the potential for movement in either direction.

- (ix) In response to a previous question raised by Councillor Afzal in relation to the petition which had been presented earlier in the meeting regarding opposition to the Council's twinning arrangement with Nablus, Councillor Maurice felt it important to clarify that the concerns highlighted regarding signatories to the petition were not the fault of the petitioners and instead exposed a flaw in the system hosting the online petition. Acknowledging the Council's actions to address the issue and role of the petitioners in also highlighting the

discrepancies identified as soon as they had been identified, which he felt may have represented a deliberate act to undermine the petition, he welcomed the commitment made to reviewing security of the current e-petition system. From his perspective, the petitioners had acted fairly, honestly, and openly when seeking support for the petition opposing the twinning arrangements which he felt had been a more open process than that undertaken by the original petition in support of the twinning arrangement and in ending sought assurance that the Council would not only address the issues highlighted in terms of the petition system but had also recognised that those petitioners opposed to the arrangement had acted honestly and fairly throughout the process.

In response, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) thanked Councillor Marice for his contribution, acknowledging the issues highlighted in relation to the petitions system given their potential to undermine the process. As a result, he confirmed that officers were reviewing future procedures in order to identify a more robust system that could be used to prevent similar issues in the future with the aim of restoring confidence and trust in the process.

- (x) Given the remaining time available the Mayor advised that he would accept one further question with Councillor Mistry taking the opportunity to highlight concerns regarding the potential for the twinning arrangement with Nablus to create division and tension between local communities within the borough. Given the repeated commitment made to protecting and serving all residents across the borough regardless of their beliefs, faith or background, an assurance was sought that in order to reflect this approach the need to ensure full and extensive consultation was undertaken on the current and all future twinning arrangements had been recognised.

In response, Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) ended the session by thanking Councillor Mistry for her comments and once again assuring members and the local community that the forthcoming twinning of Brent with Nablus was not about endorsing any religious belief or political ideology and that any future twinning arrangements would be undertaken on the basis of the updated Protocol adopted.

At this stage in proceedings, the Mayor advised that the time available for the open question session had expired. He therefore thanked all members for their contributions and advised that the meeting would move on to the next item.

Prior to moving on the Mayor took a short comfort break, with the Deputy Mayor taking over as Chair during his absence.

13. Report from Chairs of Scrutiny Committees

Having returned the Mayor moved on to deal with the updates from each Scrutiny Committee Chair, reminding members that the time set aside for this item was 12 minutes, with each Chair having up to three minutes in which to highlight any significant issues arising from the work of their Committees. Once these updates had been provided, he advised the remaining time available would then be opened up for any other non-Cabinet members to question (without the need for advance

notice) the Scrutiny Committee Chairs on matters relating to the work of their Committee.

Councillor Ketan Sheth was then invited to introduce the update report on the work being undertaken by the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee, with the following issues highlighted:

- Having congratulated Councillor Bajwa on his appointment as Deputy Mayor, and welcoming Councillor Afzal as the newly appointed Vice-Chair on the Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Ketan Sheth updated members on the work being undertaken to finalise the Committee's work programme for 2025-26 which, recognising its flexible and broad ranging nature, had included engagement with Brent Youth Parliament to ensure the views of young people across the borough were included as well as engagement with a range of other key stakeholders including local health providers, housing, social care and the local community.
- The significant work undertaken by the Committee, since the start of the 2025-26 Municipal Year with the most recent meeting focussed on the Brent Safeguarding Adults Board (Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements) Annual Report 2024 - 25 and Brent Safeguarding Children Partnership (Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements) Annual Report 2024 – 25. The Committee had been pleased to welcome the Independent Chairs of both Boards to the meeting with the primary focus on the multi-agency partnership arrangements in place to address the various safeguarding challenges identified.
- The ongoing and active engagement of the Committee in the work of the North West London Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee Brent, which Councillor Ketan Sheth continued to Chair. This had included a review of proposals relating to Palliative Care, the Health Equity Programme and on the recent proposals regarding the restructuring of NHS England (NHSE) and impact of funding reductions to the Integrated Care Strategy and Board structure along with NorthWest London Planned Care Strategy and NHS Ten Year Plan. Members were advised the work programme for the Joint Committee had also now been finalised for 2025-26 on which further updates would continue to be provided.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Ketan Sheth for his update and then, in the absence of Councillor Conneely (who it was noted had submitted apologies for absence at the meeting) invited Councillor Kennelly (as Vice Chair of the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee) to introduce the update report on the work being undertaken by that Committee with the following issues highlighted:

- The wide-ranging nature of scrutiny activity undertaken by the Committee since the last update, as set out within the update report circulated with the agenda. In noting the debate scheduled to take place on the introduction of a visitor levy, Councillor Kennelly highlighted this was a proposal which had also been considered and recommended by the Scrutiny Committee when considering the budget consultation proposals in previous years.

- In addition, attention was drawn to the next meeting of the Committee which would be scrutinising the performance of the Council's current housing repairs contractor as part of a broader review of complaints handling performance across the Council and tenant feedback arising from consideration of the 2023-34 Complaints Annual Report.
- Other items scheduled for consideration as part of the Committee's work programme during 2025-26 included an update on recycling initiatives and performance as well as ongoing monitoring of Brent's overall financial position based on a detailed review of the current 2025-26 financial forecast.
- The ongoing focus and work of the Committee in seeking to encourage, where identified as required, change and improvements in the way services were being delivered for local communities across the borough involving all relevant stakeholders with members also advised of the establishment of a Scrutiny Task Group (chaired by Councillor Mitchell) which was shortly due to commence, on Kerbside Management and thanks expressed to members and other key stakeholders for their engagement to date.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Kennelly for the updated provided and it was **RESOLVED** that the contents of both reports be noted.

Following the updates provided, the Mayor advised that the remainder of time available would be open for questions from non-cabinet members to the Scrutiny Chairs. The Mayor reminded members of the need to ensure that questions raised were focused on the updates provided or the work being undertaken by the relevant Committee.

As a result, Councillor Lorber took the opportunity to remind members of a recent call-in relating to Barham Park, which had been considered by the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee in April 25 and had included access to an exempt document relating to the valuation obtained on the modification to the restrictive covenant on 776-778 Harrow Road. Councillor Lorber advised that his understanding was that the valuation had been produced shortly in advance of the Barham Park Trust Committee which had taken the decision to approve modification of the covenant that met in February 25 and had formed the basis of the subsequent call-in. As a result of discussions with the owner of the site, however, Councillor Lorber now understood that the valuation had been agreed in advance of that timescale with clarification therefore sought on the timing of the valuation and whether this required further investigation by internal audit.

Given the nature of the issue raised, Councillor Kennelly advised (in response) that the clarification being sought would need to be followed up with officers and a written response provided given the matter was not one that fell directly within the remit or current work programme of the Scrutiny Committee.

With no further questions raised, the Mayor advised that he would move to the next item and thanked all members for their contribution.

14. **Annual Report from the Chairs of the Audit & Standards Advisory and Audit & Standards Committees**

The Mayor invited Councillor Chan, as Vice-Chair of the Audit & Standards Advisory Committee and Chair of the Audit and Standards Committee to introduce the joint annual report from both Committees, updating members on the work undertaken during the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

Prior to introducing the report Councillor Chan welcomed David Ewart to the meeting in his role as Independent Chair of the Audit & Standards Advisory Committee and in terms of issues highlighted drew members' attention to the important role and work undertaken by the Committee in relation to monitoring and advising on various governance matters relating to audit activity, the Council's finance, accounting and regulatory framework as well as members standards of conduct.

Members were advised that the approach adopted towards the work undertaken had also included consideration of the Council's risk management structure and strategic risk management process with an increasing focus not only on the effectiveness of governance processes relating to the first but also "second line" of defence in terms of the monitoring and reporting of information and data. Other key areas of focus highlighted in terms of risk had included the ongoing nature of the financial challenges and pressures faced by the Council given the demand on services, with the need identified (as a recommendation by the External Auditor in their Value for Money Report) for a focus to be maintained on the Council's overall financial resilience and sustainability in terms of future budget options and decisions. In recognising these were pressures being experienced on a national and regional basis, and not unique to Brent, Councillor Chan advised the actions being taken in seeking to address and mitigate against the risks identified would continue to be monitored as part of the efforts being made to maintain a financially resilient, balanced and sustainable budget position and to ensure maximum value was being driven in the way services were being commissioned and procured supported by ongoing lobbying for reform of the local government finance system.

In concluding, Councillor Chan thanked David Ewart and the other members of the Committee along with officers for their support over the year and advised that both Committees were looking forward to continuing their work with members and other key stakeholders to ensure the necessary focus was maintained in relation to compliance and control of the Council's key governance arrangements.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Chan for the update provided and it was **RESOLVED** to note the Joint Annual Report provided by the Chairs' of the Audit & Standards and Audit & Standards Advisory Committees outlining the work undertaken by both Committee's during 2024-25.

Prior to moving on the next item the Mayor advised that as the remaining time available for the meeting was shortly due to expire he intended to move the suspension of Standing Order 44 (Council Guillotine Procedure) in order to extend the time of the meeting by a period of 15 minutes to provide sufficient time for consideration of the remaining items on the agenda. In accordance with Standing Order 42 (d) the procedural motion was put to the vote without further discussion and declared **CARRIED**.

15. **Non Cabinet Members' Debate**

In accordance with Standing Order 34, the Mayor advised that the next item on the agenda was the non-cabinet member debate, with the subject chosen for consideration being “Empowering Brent with visitor levy powers to support our communities”.

Members were advised that the motion submitted as the basis for the debate had been circulated with the agenda and that the time available for the debate was 25 minutes.

The Mayor then invited Councillor Mitchell to introduce the motion which had been submitted as the basis for the Non-Cabinet Member debate. In moving the motion, Councillor Mitchell began by highlighting its aim in seeking to unlock an additional source of income and funding which could be utilised by the Council given its location as a cultural and economic hub. Highlighting the growing number of events taking place in Wembley, which formed a vital part of Brent’s local economy, it was pointed out these had attracted almost 2.9 million visitors during the previous year all of which supported jobs (including 1,800 Brent jobs from the Stadium), businesses and hospitality across the borough with each additional non-sporting event at Wembley Stadium estimated to generate £4.35m through direct local expenditure.

Whilst recognising the significant economic benefits, however, the additional impact these events and visitors created for local residents, including disruption, waste, congestion, noise and increased demand on council services was also recognised with the Council working proactively to mitigate these challenges in partnership with the Stadium. In addition, however, Councillor Mitchell advised the Council was also keen to explore the potential introduction of a modest visitor levy on overnight hotel and short-stay accommodation (as had been successfully introduced elsewhere) designed to generate additional income that would be ringfenced to support investment in Brent’s public realm in areas such as street trees, green infrastructure, enhanced street cleaning, and additional waste enforcement officers.

Highlighting that studies had demonstrated the use of these type of levies did not reduce tourism, Councillor Mitchell advised that the motion moved as the basis for the debate sought to recognise the benefits associated with the introduction of a visitor levy in ensuring that those benefiting from Brent’s world-class facilities were also able to contribute a small amount towards maintaining high-quality services and a cleaner, greener borough supplementing Council funding (in a progressive and practical way) at a time when the Council was also facing sustained financial pressures. As such, she commended the motion to members for debate.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Mitchell for introducing the motion and then opened up the debate for contributions from other members.

Opening the debate in support of the motion, Councillor Knight highlighted the way in which she felt such a levy would enhance the local economy whilst also celebrating the borough’s rich cultural history, pointing out its importance in not just raising revenue but also empowering the community and ensuring that the benefits of world class events could be felt by all residents. In celebrating Brent’s diverse history, reference was made to exhibitions at both Kingsbury and Willesden Green Library as a showcase, with support also expressed for the London Assembly campaign in seeking a voluntary levy on arena and stadium tickets to support

grassroots music venues and the potential value of a modest visitor levy also recognised in terms of being able to support the development of further cultural opportunities and in honouring the legacy of Brent.

As a further contribution, Councillor Clinton advised that the Liberal Democrats Group would be supporting the motion subject to assurance regarding the necessary financial prudence and due diligence, recognising they had also been campaigning on the same issue and with support also expressed for the long awaited introduction of a music venue levy. In seeking action to progress the proposal, Councillor Clinton felt the Council should also consider writing to the Prime Minister as well as Mayor for London and Stadium seeking support, including the introduction of a voluntary levy on arena and stadium tickets to support local venues and organisations such as East Lane Theatre Club.

Also speaking in support of the motion, Councillor Nerva thanked Councillor Mitchell for highlighting the benefits of the visitor levy which he pointed out would benefit not just the immediate area surrounding the Stadium complex in Wembley but also areas across the rest of the borough, recognising the rise of Brent as a hospitality destination similar to other cities in and outside of the UK and as a borough capable of delivering such a scheme.

In welcoming the motion and subject of the debate, Councillor Kelcher also spoke in support highlighting his previous engagement in the idea as part of a wider Tourist Strategy. Whilst recognising the benefits identified, it was pointed out that the level of any levy would need to be carefully managed, with Brent's strength in terms of the assets available for tourists to enjoy highlighted. In expressing his support for the motion, Councillor Kelcher hoped all members would recognise the benefit for Brent residents, as a means of balancing the demand placed on service following events taking place with the approach already successfully delivered in many other cities across the UK and other parts of the world.

In reiterating the support expressed by the Liberal Democrats Group for the proposed introduction of a levy Councillor Lorber, also supported the need to ensure this was not seen as excessive in order to avoid any detrimental impact on the local economy and in making the current cost-of-living crisis any worse on individual households with the administrative burden on businesses in the borough also, he felt, needing to be carefully assessed. As a final comment in support, the need was also identified to ensure the VAT implications arising from any levy were also fully considered in order to ensure this could be claimed by the Council rather than central government.

Councillor Mistry spoke next and whilst recognising the unique value and benefits delivered through the location of the Stadium complex in Brent in terms of the local economy, jobs and in placing Brent on the map also felt it important to recognise the risks associated with the proposal given its effective status as an additional local tax on visitors for any type of overnight stay, which had the potential to impact not just those visiting the area to attend events at the Stadium or other venues. As such, the Conservative Group felt there was a need to ensure a joined up approach with the Mayor of London and London Councils to avoid the development of a confusing and uncoordinated approach to the implementation of charges across London. In addition, further assurance was sought regarding the way in which the levy would be used to provide funds to support the Public Realm, street cleaning,

waste enforcement and parks rather than being absorbed into the General Fund. Highlighting the increasing tax burden on households across the borough, Councillor Mistry also felt consideration should be given to the opportunities available, working in partnership with organisations such as the Football Association and other local partners, to seek support in improving Brent's public realm rather than relying on the introduction of a visitor levy. Given the potential risks identified in terms of the impact on the local economy and uncertainty for those visiting the borough whilst also avoiding what they felt to be the real challenge in delivering value for money, Councillor Mistry advised that the Conservative Group would not therefore be supporting the motion.

In view of the remaining time available the Mayor then invited Councillor Benea (as Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Property) to summarise and close the debate.

In closing the debate, Councillor Benea thanked Councillor Mitchell for bringing forward such a timely and important motion for debate. In recognising Brent's pride at being able to host what were recognised as major world class events at the Stadium complex and the value generated for not only the local but also London's economy as a result (involving the creation of significant numbers of jobs as well as additional revenue) she felt there was no doubting the way in which Brent was able to thrive from its status as one of the world's leading event destinations.

Whilst these events were, however, recognised as boosting the economy, the pressure being placed on key local services, the public realm and residents was also acknowledged given the additional demand placed on local infrastructure. As a result, it was felt that the introduction of a modest visitor levy would represent a practical, fair and progressive measure and approach in seeking to ensure that those who benefitted from Wembley's global pull also helped to invest back into the boroughs neighbourhoods, whether that was keeping Brent clean and green, improving parks or boosting enforcement with the same approach already common in cities like Amsterdam, Lisbon and Venice. Members were also reminded that cities such as Glasgow had already been given the powers to act in a similar way with the motion therefore aimed at ensuring Brent and London was not left behind.

Highlighting her commitment to pushing for the necessary powers, working on a cross party and collaborative basis with the Council's partners, residents and Mayor of London, Councillor Benea ended by hoping all members would support the motion in seeking to secure a fair deal for Brent which would enable residents to feel the benefit of sharing their home with a world class venue and in making sure this success could be shared moving forward.

Having thanked members for their contributions, the Mayor then moved to the vote on the motion moved as the basis for the Non-Cabinet Member debate which was declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to approve the following motion as the outcome of the non-cabinet member debate:

Empowering Brent with Visitor Levy Powers to Support Our Communities

This Council notes:

- The growing number of successful events taking place in Wembley, which are a vital part of Brent's local economy, attracting visitors from across the country and around the world, supporting jobs (1,800 Brent jobs from the Stadium), businesses and hospitality across our borough.
- Each additional non-sporting event at Wembley Stadium generates an estimated £4.35 million through direct local expenditure. With Oasis, Coldplay and other acts arriving this summer, Wembley Park will be in the spotlight as a world-class cultural destination.
- Hotel occupancy is high across Wembley during events at the Stadium or the Arena and capacity is estimated at nearly 1,800 rooms.
- Aside from the significant economic benefits, major events in Wembley understandably bring additional pressures on residents, including disruption, waste, congestion, noise and increased demand on council services.
- Brent Council is working proactively to mitigate these challenges, partnering with Wembley Stadium to ensure tickets are shared in the local community, giving residents access to events happening on their doorstep.
- Glasgow City Council has been granted powers to introduce a modest Visitor Levy (on average £4.83 per night), which could generate £16m in additional income from overnight stays, with the funds ringfenced for services such as street sweeping, parks, infrastructure, and environmental enforcement.

This Council also notes:

- The recommendation made by the London Assembly, that the Mayor of London should 'advocate for London's live music industry to introduce a voluntary levy on arena and stadium tickets to support grassroots music venues in London.'

This Council believes:

- Brent should be empowered by government with powers to introduce a visitor levy on hotel and short-stay accommodation within the borough.
- The revenue generated should be invested into transforming Brent's public realm making Brent greener through investment in street trees and green infrastructure, enhanced street cleaning, and additional waste enforcement officers.
- A visitor levy would ensure those who benefit from Brent's world-class facilities also contribute a small amount towards maintaining high-quality services and a cleaner, greener borough.
- This is a progressive, and practical measure utilised across European cities and could supplement council funding at a time when local authorities like Brent face sustained financial pressures.

This Council therefore resolves to:

- (1) Write to the Secretary of State, calling for London boroughs, including Brent, to be granted the powers to introduce a discretionary visitor levy on overnight stays.
- (2) Write to the Mayor of London to support the London Assembly call for a voluntary levy on stadium and arena tickets to fund grassroots cultural opportunities.
- (3) Continue to work with partners including Quintain, the FA, event organisers, businesses and residents to ensure that the benefits of Wembley's success are shared fairly, and that residents' voices shape our work to establish a Visitors Levy here in Brent.
- (4) Work with London Councils, the GLA, and the LGA to build cross-party support for an amendment to the English Devolution Bill to grant the powers necessary to all local authorities to introduce Visitors Levies where supported.

16. **Representation of Political Groups on Committees**

Moving on the final item of business, the Mayor then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt (as Leader of the Council) to introduce a report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources which the Leader advised fulfilled the Council's duty to review and determine the representation of different political groups on certain Committees following any change in balance between the political groups on the Council. Members were advised that the report had been presented due to a recent change in membership impacting on the current number of councillors within the Labour Group serving on the Council. In presenting the report, it was, however, noted that the change identified had not resulted in any amendment needing to be made to the existing allocation of seats base on the revised overall composition of political groups.

As no other members indicated that they wished to speak on the item and the Leader of the Council advising he did not wish to exercise any right of reply the Mayor put the recommendations straight to the vote and they were declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To agree the size of each Committee, as detailed within the report, having noted these remained unchanged from the previous review undertaken at the Annual Council meeting in May 2025.
- (2) To confirm the allocation of seats on Committees to each of the Council's political groups (where the rules of political balance applied) as set out within the report.
- (3) To note that the political balance on Council Sub-Committees would be reviewed at the first available meeting of the General Purposes Committee and Licensing Committee.

17. Exclusion of the Press & Public

There were no items that required the exclusion of the press and public from the meeting.

18. Urgent Business

There were no urgent items of business raised at the meeting so the Mayor, in closing the meeting, thanked all members for their co-operation and support and advised that he looked forward to seeing everyone again in person at the next Full Council which would taking place at 6pm on Monday15 September 2025.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm

COUNCILLOR RYAN HACK
Mayor