

 Brent	Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee 19 January 2026
	Report from the Corporate Director of Residents and Housing Services and the Corporate Director of Children Young People and Community Development
	Cabinet Member for Customer Experience, Resident Support and Culture (Cllr Promise Knight) and Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Schools (Councillor Gwen Grahl)
Tackling Poverty in Brent	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Non-key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Temporary Accommodation usage figures Appendix 2 – Child Poverty and Free School Meal figures Appendix 3 – Summary of current poverty commitments
Background Papers:	Poverty Commission Report
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1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report is requested as a follow-up to the previous scrutiny session on poverty and cost-of-living issues. It provides a detailed, evidence-based update on Brent's progress and challenges in implementing commitments related to poverty reduction, cost-of-living support, housing and child poverty alleviation.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

The Committee are asked to:

- 2.1 Note the council's progress on tackling poverty since the Poverty Commission in 2021.
- 2.2 Note the approach to tackle poverty across the following key areas: Response to the cost-of-living crisis, Housing and Homelessness and Child Poverty.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1.1 This report contributes to all the Borough Plan priorities, with the Borough Plan itself underpinning the council's commitments to tackling poverty, as well as strategies underneath this including the Brent Youth Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Climate and EDI Strategy.

3.2 Background

- 3.2.1 The Joseph Rowntree Foundation defines poverty as "occurring when a person's material resources do not meet their minimum needs for everyday living, including the social participation expected in society."

In Brent, tackling poverty means a commitment to building a borough where every resident has the opportunity to thrive. Tackling poverty is central to this vision. We know that poverty is not just about income; it affects health, education, housing, and overall wellbeing. That's why our approach is holistic, resident-focused, and rooted in fairness.

We are working to continue to reduce inequality and support those most affected by the cost-of-living crisis through practical, targeted measures. This means investing in services that make a real difference: from expanding access to affordable housing and childcare, to strengthening employment pathways and skills development, and income/benefit maximisation. We are also prioritising early intervention through Family Wellbeing Centres, ensuring families receive support before challenges escalate.

Our approach is guided by collaboration, with local partners, voluntary organisations, and residents themselves. We are committed to protecting essential services, providing emergency assistance where needed, and creating long-term solutions that break the cycle of disadvantage.

This report reflects our determination to act with compassion and ambition. Every initiative is designed with one goal in mind: to help those who need us most and to create a fairer, more inclusive Brent for everyone.

3.2.2 The Poverty Commission: Setting the Context

The Brent Poverty Commission was launched in January 2020 by Brent Council to examine the scale and drivers of poverty across the borough. Chaired by Lord Richard Best and supported by a panel of experts, frontline practitioners, and residents, the six-month review provided a comprehensive assessment of the challenges facing Brent. In its final report, published in August 2020, the Commission set out more than 40 recommendations for action. The recommendations were completed following the council's action plan, focusing on the interconnected themes of Housing, Economy and Jobs and Financial exclusion and Local Welfare.

The Poverty Commission provided a clear framework for tackling inequality and improving life chances across the borough. Its recommendations were grouped under three core themes: Housing, Economy and Jobs, and Tackling Financial Exclusion. These themes remain central to our work, but the landscape has evolved significantly since the Commission's report, shaped by new challenges such as the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and shifts in national and local policy. Poverty is not just about low income; it is a lived experience shaped by factors such as housing, employment, health, education, and access to support. For residents, poverty can mean choices no one should have to make: between heating and eating, paying rent or buying essentials, or sacrificing opportunities for themselves or their children.

There is no single measure that fully captures this complexity. Statistics tell part of the story, but they cannot reflect the daily realities faced residents. For that reason, this report takes a broad approach, looking across multiple indicators and themes. By doing so, we aim to provide a more complete picture of poverty in the borough and how the council is tackling this. This report provides an overview of the current position on the key areas highlighted by the Poverty Commission, alongside Brent's broader approach to tackling poverty. It also includes updates on priority issues requested by the Committee and a summary of other areas identified by the Poverty Commission, including the council's efforts to tackle period poverty (section 5.8 of this report.)

3.2.3 Poverty Commission recommendations and Delivery Plan

The Poverty Commission set out three key themes for tackling inequality: Housing, Economy and Jobs, and Financial Inclusion and Local Welfare. All actions identified by the Commission were completed as part of the council's [Delivery Plan](#) in 2021. Since then, the council has driven forward meaningful progress to build on the positive work of the Commission, highlighted throughout this report.

3.2.4 *Looking Ahead*

This progress demonstrates how the council has adapted to changing circumstances while maintaining the spirit of the Poverty Commission's recommendations. The following sections of this report will build on this foundation, providing an overview of poverty in the borough, as well as how the council will continue to tackle poverty and inequality through the key themes: A summary of current poverty levels in Brent (Section 3.2.6), Employment support (Section 4.0), Cost-of-Living support (Section 5.0), Housing and Homelessness (Section 6.0) and Child Poverty (Section 7.0).

3.2.5 *Poverty in Brent – where we are now*

Since the commission's findings, Brent, alongside the rest of the country, has faced additional pressures from national and global events. The Covid-19 pandemic, soaring inflation, rising food and fuel costs, a deepening housing crisis, an ageing population, and persistently high levels of child poverty have all combined to create a severe cost-of-living emergency for many residents. To help provide an overview of poverty in the borough, this report draws on evidence from a range of sources including local and national data, as well as Brent's own strategies and plans.

Poverty in Brent – the current picture

- Brent has a poverty rate of 33%, the seventh highest rate in London. This indicator presents the percentage of people living in poverty (Trust for London, 2023/24).
- The latest data for April 2025 suggests that currently, around, 3,680 Universal Credit households in Brent are adversely impacted by the two-child limit – the 14th highest in England. A total of 13,620 children in Brent live in these households. (Brent Open Data)
- Brent is relatively more deprived in 2025 than in 2019 (Indices of Deprivation, further information in section 3.2.6).
- 12% of households in Brent are experiencing fuel poverty (Trust for London data, 2021)
- 18.2% of Brent residents are on out-of-work benefits, the 5th highest rate in London (Trust for London, Q4 2024).
- Temporary accommodation tenancies have increased by 55% since 2021.

3.2.6 Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2025 – changes in Brent

Brent has become relatively more deprived compared to 2019, according to the latest [Index of Multiple Deprivation](#) (IMD) analysis. IMD ranks every small area in England, known as Lower Super Output Area (LSOA), across seven domains: including income, employment, health, education, housing, crime, and living environment, to provide a total measure of deprivation.

For Brent's 181 LSOAs:

- 31% remained in the same deprivation decile,
- 11% improved by one decile,
- 58% moved into a more deprived decile.

The overall pattern of deprivation remains concentrated in Stonebridge, Roundwood, and Harlesden & Kensal Green, with Dollis Hill and Welsh Harp now joining these areas. A significant rise in income deprivation scores reflects changes to IMD methodology, which now accounts for housing costs, which provides a more accurate picture of residents' lived experience rather than an actual increase in income insecurity. Housing costs have now also been recognised in the local government finance settlement in December 2025, where this issue has been included in funding allocation to local authority areas, including outer London boroughs like Brent.

The table below shows the headline changes in the key measures from 2019 to 2025:

Measure	2019	2025
Income Deprivation Score	15.5%	36.7%
Income Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI)	18.2%	58.7%
Income Deprivation Affecting Older People (IDAOPI)	25.8%	33.1%
Employment Deprivation Score	9.7%	14.6%

3.2.7 Social Progress index

Brent's [Social Progress Index](#) (SPI) is a ward-level data tool designed to measure outcomes for residents beyond economic indicators.

The SPI 48 indicators across three dimensions:

- Basic Human Needs (shelter, safety, nutrition, health)
- Foundations of Wellbeing (education, access to information, environmental quality)

- Opportunity (inclusiveness, personal freedom, access to advanced education).

The SPI also highlights correlations between non-economic factors, such as educational attainment, health outcomes, and housing conditions, and economic measures like employment rates, income levels, and financial resilience. For example, areas with lower qualification levels often show higher unemployment and economic inactivity, while poor housing quality can compound health issues that limit workforce participation.

These relationships highlight why tackling poverty requires more than economic interventions alone. Improvements in areas including education, health, and housing are essential to enabling economic opportunity for residents. To help understand these links better, these insights are now embedded into the council's Equality Impact Assessments through the council's recent adoption of the Socio-Economic Duty, strengthening our commitment to tackling poverty by ensuring socio-economic status is considered as an internally recognised protected characteristic.

3.2.8 *Current Poverty Commitments*

Appendix 3 illustrates a summary of Brent's current commitments to tackling poverty. Despite no single approach, tackling poverty is an inherent part of the council's culture as reflected in the range of strategies and commitments outlined in the appendix. This ethos to tackling poverty reflects the political values, organisational culture and our communities' values.

4.0 **Employment Support**

Secure employment, good pay and education all have an impact on poverty levels. While school academic outcomes in Brent are strong, vocational outcomes and opportunities for well-paid local work for residents are areas to be improved upon. Some of the key statistics around Brent's population relating to economy, employment and jobs in Brent are summarised below and will form part of a new Council strategy on employment and skills to be completed in spring 2026.

- **Demography.** Brent is a diverse borough in north-west London with a population of 339,816 as of the 2021 Census. A significant portion of its population (56.1%) was born outside the UK and median age is 35.5 years. A key demographic advantage for Brent is that nearly 70% of the population is of working age (16-64 years)
- **Employment and inactivity.** Brent has a high level of economic engagement amongst its working-age residents. The economic activity rate for people aged 16-64 was 84.4% between April 2024 and March 2025, which is higher than both the national (78.5%) and London (79.6%) averages. Also, the unemployment rate in Brent was 7.1% for the same period, which is higher than the national rate

- **Economic inactivity.** Brent's economic inactivity rate for the 16-64 age group was 15.6% between April 2024 and March 2025, which is below the national (21.5%) and London (20.4%) averages. A significant proportion of this inactivity is linked to students, which accounted for 44.9% of the economically inactive population in Brent, compared to 26.9% nationally.
- **Female employment.** There is a gender gap in the labour market. The economic activity rate for males in Brent is 90%, compared to 78.9% for females. The male employment rate is 88.6%, while for females it is 70.6%. The self-employment rate for males is higher than the national average, but the sample size for female self-employed people is too small to provide a reliable estimate
- **Businesses.** The vast majority of businesses in Brent are micro-businesses, employing 0 to 9 people (92.1% of all businesses)
- **Skills and employability initiatives.** Brent Start had 2,273 students and 7,022 enrolments in the 2023/24 academic year. The most popular area of study was English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), with 29% of learners.
- **Brent Works** focuses on recruitment and apprenticeships and recently organised a jobs fair at Wembley that attracted over 9,000 people
- **The Shaw Trust** runs programs such as "Connect to Work" and "WorkWell" for supported pathways into employment, which is detailed in section 4.2.

4.1 *Employment support for residents*

Practically, the council has worked on initiatives to improve employment opportunities for residents, as well as fostering a community-based approach and ensure that there is capacity for community organisations to make a difference. Some of the key achievements are summarised below:

- Launch of *Brent Good Work Standard* to improve employment opportunities and workplace standards, whilst gaining recognition as accredited Brent Good Work Standard employers. Participating employers focus on four key pillars:
 - Promoting workplace wellbeing
 - Encouraging diversity and inclusive recruitment
 - Providing skills development and progression opportunities
 - Paying the London Living Wage
- The employment team has continued to advocate for Disability Confident Employers in the borough which now encompasses 39 companies.

- Brent Works continues to host a range of employability focused workshops and events to promote careers and training opportunities with a particular focus on growth sectors in the borough. This includes the Wembley Jobs Fair and multiple smaller events linked to National Apprenticeship Week, National Careers Week and International Women's Day, as well as localised events to target key opportunities, such as NHS roles, in more deprived areas of the borough.
- Significant progress is underway to restore Picture Palace and transform it into a vibrant, community-managed space. This initiative aims to preserve the building's cultural heritage while creating an inclusive hub for local residents, offering opportunities for arts, events, and social activities. By returning the Picture Palace to community use, we are fostering a sense of ownership, encouraging collaboration, and ensuring the space serves as a catalyst for creativity and social connection.
- Social value commitments include the offer of specialist training to upskill local talent, foster inclusivity and build long-term capacity. In addition, we create meaningful opportunities for collaboration and engagement with residents, businesses, and community organisations, promoting shared ownership of outcomes and driving sustainable social impact.
- The spring 2026 employment and skills strategy will aim to better co-ordinate local arrangements and ensure the Council is best placed to take advantage of regional and national funding opportunities.

4.2 *Supported Pathways*

The Shaw Trust has been commissioned by Brent, the GLA and the West London Alliance to undertake work into supported pathways into employment. Programmes include:

- **Connect to work:** Designed to help people with barriers to employment (e.g. health conditions, long-term unemployment) gain access to personalised employment support. It focuses on people who may not qualify for mainstream services. Once in employment, the programme continues to work with the person to help them sustain their newly found role.
- **WorkWell:** This is a free service for people who are in a job or looking for one but need support with health-related challenges.
- **MSK Trailblazer:** This is a support service offering free gym membership, physiotherapy, and 1:1 job coaching to residents with joint, bone, or muscle conditions. MSK Trailblazer is funded by the DWP via the GLA

5.0 **Brent's response to the Cost-of-Living Crisis / Support Grants and Funds**

The below information summarises Brent's support to residents struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, including the number of residents in receipt of support around housing, food and council tax support. Additionally, this section covers interventions in conjunction with the voluntary and community sector, through

Brent Hubs and food initiatives with Sufra. These interventions provide residents with crucial financial and wellbeing support, including the positive impact of the New Horizon Centre, which is covered in section 5.5 of this report.

5.1 *Discretionary Housing Payments*

The Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) allocation for Brent for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 is £1,620,155. DHP provides short-term, flexible support to residents who receive Housing Benefit or the housing costs element of Universal Credit but are struggling to meet their full housing costs. This support can help cover rent shortfalls, assist residents with rent arrears to maintain their tenancy, and contribute to moving costs when relocating to more affordable or suitable accommodation. DHP can also help address financial pressures arising from welfare reforms, including the benefit cap, under-occupation (bedroom tax), or Local Housing Allowance shortfalls.

Between 1 April 2025 and 30 October 2025, a total of 382 cases were awarded DHP, amounting to £857,000. Demand for DHP payments remains high, with a significant proportion of applications resulting in awards. At the time of writing, the council is in the process of assessing a further 380 applications. Current forecasts indicate that the full DHP allocation will be utilised by 31 March 2026.

5.2 *Allocation of Household Support Funding*

For the financial year 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026, the DWP allocated £4.9 million in Household Support Funding to Brent. Under the quarterly return process, we have submitted returns covering the period 1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025 and has thus far received £2,846,866.46. The £4.9 million in funding has been allocated across a number of programmes, as set out below, and we anticipate fully utilising all funds by 31 March 2026.

Table: Household Support Fund Costs 25/26

Household Support Fund Costs 25/26	25/26 programme costs
Funding for CRF and RSF payments (All households – top up the Resident Support Fund and provide ongoing reactive crisis support through the online application process.	£1,565,482
Food vouchers up to an including October 2025 half term. Total of 8 weeks for approximately 10,652 @£15	£1,278,240
Food vouchers Xmas 2025, February Half Term, Easter 2026 Total of 5 weeks for approximately 11,867 @£15	£798,900
Sufra CWS contract	£400,000

Grant for Alpertown Employment & Skills (Grand Union Employments and Skills Hub with London's Community Kitchen)	£20,000
Grant for debt advice provision (CAB started December 2024, 3 years plus 1 plus 1)	£100,000
Sheriff Centre debt advice to March 2026	£40,000
Grant for immigration advice provision	£53,200
Grant for additional food support initiatives	£10,000
Top up for Credit Union loan fund	£100,000
Well and Warm	£136,000
Administration costs	£400,000
Total costs	4,901,822

5.3 *Credit Union*

From 1 April 2025 to 30 October 2025, the Credit Union received 72 applications, of which 22 loans were approved and disbursed, totalling £122,000 in lending. The Credit Union provides a community-based, not-for-profit service offering safe and affordable savings and loan products. It supports residents in managing their finances, helping to reduce reliance on high-cost credit and promoting financial resilience.

5.4 *Community and Partnership Work*

Brent Hubs provide support to residents who face barriers in accessing mainstream services. This includes issuing vouchers to residents in urgent need of food or fuel support, as well as making referrals to food aid providers and utility support schemes. Between 1 April 2025 and December 2025, 1,137 residents have been supported with food and fuel needs through referrals to food banks.

Brent Hubs have also contributed significantly to the Warm Spaces initiative, including hosting Green Doctor surgeries at Willesden and Harlesden. In addition, community engagement activities, such as the regular coffee mornings in Kilburn, which attract approximately 25 residents per session, continue to strengthen local connections and reduce isolation.

In 2025, the most common issues residents sought support with at the Hubs were:

- Council Tax: 2,537 enquiries (18%)

- Form Filling: 2,472 enquiries (17%)
- Housing and Homelessness: 1,850 enquiries (13%)
- Food and Fuel: 1,627 enquiries (12%)
- General Enquiries: 1,578 enquiries (11%)

The remaining 29% of enquiries related to a wide range of other support needs, including employment, debt and money advice, and immigration support.

5.5 *The New Horizon Centre*

The New Horizon Centre, through joint working with Sufra, launched in January 2025, providing integrated food aid, advice, and wellbeing services to support Brent residents facing hardship. The allocation to this project is £400K. Below are the current statistics to 30 October 2025.

Table: New Horizon Centre support:

Indicator	Statistics
Applications	719
Memberships Started	382
Average Conversion Rate	66.80%
Community Shop Visits	3800
Café Visits	4,755
Community Kitchens (Evening Meals)	8121
Advice Appointments	320
Wellbeing Event Attendees	382
Partner Sessions in Space	147
Partner Drop-in Attendees	467

5.6 *Council Tax Support*

Brent's Council Tax Support Scheme is a local scheme that provides financial assistance to eligible residents on a low income to help them pay their Council Tax bills. Support depends on a person's personal and household weekly income. In 2025/26, residents have been supported with:

- Total support for 2025/26 is £26.4m, with a breakdown of the number of residents supported in each ward below.

Table: Council Tax Support – number of residents supported

Wards	Number of Residents supported
Alperton	850
Barnhill	753
Brondesbury Park	988
Cricklewood & Mapesbury	1,162

Dollis Hill	1,817
Harlesden & Kensal Green	2,001
Kenton	702
Kilburn	1,858
Kingsbury	595
Northwick Park	365
Preston	516
Queens Park	1,025
Queensbury	664
Roundwood	1,941
Stonebridge	2,372
Sudbury	623
Tokington	375
Welsh Harp	1,100
Wembley Central	733
Wembley Hill	739
Wembley Park	426
Willesden Green	1,688
Total	23,293

5.7 *Council Tax Hardship Fund*

The Council Tax Hardship Fund is a short-term, one-off award to help residents who have tried to access all other forms of help and financial support to pay their Council Tax bill. So far this year, 430 residents have been supported through reactive support with £144,350 spent, and a further £1.3m will be awarded to residents who are financially struggling and are on Council tax Support in 2025/26. This proactive measure aims to prevent arrears and reduce the stress associated with Council Tax payments for those on low incomes.

By combining reactive assistance with planned future investment, the Council Tax Hardship Fund underscores the Council's dedication to protecting residents from financial exclusion and maintaining stability during times of economic uncertainty.

5.8 *Reducing Period Poverty through Period Dignity Brent*

As part of the recommendations from the Poverty Commission, Period poverty was identified to scrutiny as a key issue affecting poverty and women's health. An update on the project's progress was presented to the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on 17 September 2025.

With social enterprise Hey Girls, the council has been piloting a new Period Dignity approach since November 2024. The language of 'Period Dignity' was chosen to reduce the stigma for people accessing support for period products. The pilot provides free disposable pads, tampons and reusable period cups

across 17 council owned sites: Brent Libraries, Family Wellbeing Centres, Kilburn Hub, The Living Room and New Horizon Centre. These sites encompass some of the council's core resident facing services including those already set up to support and provide a range of services for residents experiencing financial hardship. Since the committee were last updated on the project, the pilot has been extended, with a £30,000 budget over a three-year period coordinated by the Public Health team.

The table below shows the take up of products from the first phase of the pilot, up until August 2025:

Product distribution data

November 2024-August 2025					
	Number of sites	Requests of restock	Disposable Pads	Disposable Tampons	Reusable Period Cups
Libraries	6	27	11200	3264	288
FWC	8	18	6820	2688	120
Hubs (inc . New Horizons Centre)	3	4	2660	1920	84
Total	17	49	20680	7872	492

5.9 Future Planning

Household Income Maximisation

In early 2026 the council will build on the success of the Brent Hubs model by delivering a small-scale pilot of preventative support for low-income households. The council is in the process of implementing the LIFT (Low Income Family Tracker) tool. This is anticipated to be available from February and will give powerful insights into Brent's residents to identify the most vulnerable families, target support to them, and track the change. The pilot project will draw together staff from different teams within the council to test a more proactive approach to identifying and working with households that are identified as being at risk of financial hardship, debt or homelessness. We propose to test approaches to working with identified households to ensure that all forms of income maximisation are explored resulting in more sustainable financial or housing situations; this might include ensuring the household is in receipt of all benefits they are eligible for, identifying sources of discretionary support that could be accessed and/or considering routes to work. The overall

aim is to support households on low incomes with sustainable solutions to maximise their income and reduce the risk of debt or homelessness.

School Uniform Support Funding

The council will be delivering a pilot project to provide financial support to low-income households who have children entering school in Reception and Year 7 in September 2026. The aim is to alleviate some of the cost pressures that families will typically feel when having to purchase full school uniform for the first time. Research has shown that this pressure is felt most acutely as children enter their first year of either primary or secondary school. This project is funded through NCIL funding awarded for initiatives to address the cost of living and its impact will be evaluated after this pilot year. Additionally, the current Schools and Wellbeing Bill proposes a reduction in the amount of branded items a child must have when starting school which will also help to support households with budgeting.

6.0 Housing and Homelessness

Brent is committed to tackling the housing crisis through a mix of new-build council homes, affordable housing partnerships, and community-led schemes. While financial pressures have slowed some projects, the borough still expects to deliver many affordable homes by the end of 2026, including major developments in Wembley and Church End. Alongside new supply, Brent is taking robust enforcement action against rogue landlords, with borough-wide licensing and targeted inspections to protect tenants and raise standards in the private rented sector.

6.1 *Temporary Accommodation*

Brent faces unprecedented housing pressures, with demand for homelessness services far outweighing supply. Temporary accommodation is intended as a short-term solution while homelessness applications are assessed but rising rents and a shortage of affordable homes mean many families remain in TA for extended periods. The figures in Appendix 1 display the demand for Temporary Accommodation, as well as a breakdown by household type, with the level of single homelessness applications continuing to outstrip that of families.

The Preventing Homelessness Improvement Programme has now been established with agreed objectives and key results (OKRs). This focuses on preventing people from becoming homeless, aligning with Radical Place Leadership work and improving the service provided by our Housing Needs and Support department. This aims to eventually reduce the council's spend on temporary accommodation. Performance and progress is being reported through the Embrace Change Portfolio.

The Programme is building on and developing new initiatives to reduce and prevent homelessness, including:

- Working with Xantura to develop a data-led prevention approach that securely brings together data from across council services to identify households at risk of homelessness earlier, enabling proactive engagement and timely support before crisis point.
- Working with Greenlight to acquire self-contained leased accommodation at scale and step down the 100 most expensive temporary accommodation placements. We have already stepped down, moved on or discharged over 60 of the most expensive temporary accommodation placements.
- Developing incentives for private sector landlords, to increase the number of private rented sector studios and one-bedroom properties we can offer
- Developing a B&B elimination plan prioritising the removal of families with dependent children from B&B placements. The number families in B&B has dropped rapidly in accordance with our B&B elimination plan and currently stands at 8.
- Continuing work on the Find a place you can afford campaign, including trialling new incentives.
- Strengthening partnerships with ASC, CEF, Beam, Crisis, and community groups.
- Revitalising Housing Resolution Officers (HRO) team with a proactive approach, as well as embedding relational practice and wellbeing initiatives.

6.2 *Affordable Housing Delivery*

The council has a commitment to deliver 5,000 affordable homes in Brent by 2028, of which 1,700 will need to be delivered directly by the council. As at the end of March 2025, the council has delivered 758 affordable homes with a further 1,074 being built on site that are due to complete by March 2028.

The figures below show the breakdown of Affordable Housing Completions since April 2025:

Grand Union Phase 2: 115 homes (May 25)

Aneurin Bevan Court: 9 homes (July 25)

Fulton Road: 297 homes (September 25)

Total: 421 homes

A further 303 homes will be completed by the end of March 2026 with the remaining 353 homes to be delivered in future financial years and before March 2028.

6.3 *Private Rented Sector*

Brent Council's Cabinet approved the borough-wide Additional Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing scheme in October 2025. This new scheme applies to HMOs with 3-4 occupants in multiple households and comes into force on 2 February 2026, running until 2 February 2031. Applications opened on 17 November 2025, with licence fees set at £1,040, while early applications qualify for a reduced rate of £840.

6.4 *Find a place you can afford*

Even though Brent has been leading the way in building new homes, with the second highest number of new builds completed out of all the London boroughs over the past 10 years, our supply cannot cope with this surge in demand. To this end, the council launched the 'Find a Place You Can Afford' campaign to highlight current housing pressures, the limited availability of Council social housing, and steps residents can take to secure and/or retain their own stable and affordable accommodation.

The campaign continues to be reviewed to adapt to new opportunities and needs. We will also continue to encourage and give frontline officers the space to suggest new initiatives and ways of working within their teams.

6.5 *Future Planning*

The Council has launched its new Housing and Homelessness Strategy, running from 2026-2031. The strategy was informed by a robust homelessness review, and sets out five outcome-based commitments, setting out how we intend to build upon the existing homelessness services we deliver to not only ensure that we meet our statutory obligations and strive to end homelessness in Brent, but that we also provide a service that is person-centred, prevention focused and forward thinking. Despite the track record of success on housebuilding, the council acknowledge the current viability challenges on the council's plans for self-delivering of new-build social rent schemes and that officers are exploring alternative approaches for addressing Brent's housing needs.

Additionally, the below figures show the breakdown of the Council-led delivery of affordable homes in 2025/26 and projections for 26/27.

Affordable Housing Currently on Site

- Clock Cottage: 13 homes (expected to complete Jan 26)
- Watling Gardens: 125 homes (expected to complete Jan 26)
- Pharamond: 10 homes (expected to complete Jan 26)
- Alperton Bus Garage: 155 homes (expected to complete Feb 26)
- Church End: 99 homes (expected to complete May 26)
- Wembley Housing Zone – 141 homes (expected to complete September 2026)
- Carlton & Granville – 18 homes (expected to complete August 2027)
- Neville & Winterleys – 95 homes (expected to complete September 2027)

Total: 656 homes

Affordable Housing with Planning Permission and currently under Contractor Procurement

- Edgware Road – 125 homes (target start on site date anticipated as September 2026)

Total: 125 homes

7.0 Efforts to tackle Child Poverty

Child poverty refers to children living in families whose income and resources are insufficient to provide an adequate standard of living; encompassing food, clothing, housing, health, education, and participation opportunities. Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) describes it as insufficient income to afford the same essentials and societal participation that others enjoy.

While, as set out above, the Council is doing a lot to support families in the context of the cost of living and housing crises, mitigating the impact of poverty on children remains a core priority. Poverty impacts at each stage of a child's life from birth through early years and time at school to young adulthood. Children living in poverty tend not to perform as well at school as their peers and the gap can widen as they progress through school. We also know that poverty can impact on children's health and wellbeing as well as their education and learning needs. Disadvantages during childhood can influence long-term educational achievement, health and employment prospects, with the risk of perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

To mitigate the impacts of poverty on children, the Council has a number of intervention strategies in place, such as holiday food vouchers for children eligible for free school meals, extended until Easter 2027, ensuring consistent access to nutritious meals during school breaks. These interventions complement wider equity strategies, addressing the disproportionate impact of rising living costs on families with children. Brent's approach combines immediate relief with longer-term initiatives, such as community wellbeing support and youth engagement programmes through the Early Help offer, to tackle the impacts of poverty.

The council is actively implementing government initiatives that are part of the national Child Poverty Strategy, published in December 2025, aimed at supporting all children to achieve, as they emerge. This includes extension of the childcare/early education entitlement, free breakfast clubs, a focus on children's early years educational attainment, extending Free School Meal entitlement to all households in receipt of Universal Credit, continued delivery of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme and the Families First reform of children social care and early intervention support for families.

7.1 *Child Poverty Rates in Brent*

Child poverty is measured as relative low income after taking into account housing costs. Anyone living in a household with less than 60% of the income of a household in the middle (median) of the income distribution is defined as being in relative low income after housing costs. Data from the Trust for London shows that Brent's child poverty rates sit at 41% compared to the London average of 35% after considering housing costs, whereas this number is much

lower at 20% if they are not considered. Figures comparing Brent to other London Boroughs are included in Appendix 2.

7.2 *Free School Meals*

According to government data as of May 2025, 25.1% of Brent pupils are eligible for benefits-related Free School Meals (FSM) during term time, which is a 2% increase from 23/24, though slightly lower than the national average of 26.7%. Appendix 2 displays the breakdown of Free School Meals over the past four academic years in Brent. There is likely to be under representation of FSM applications in Brent due to some families' reluctance to come forward, but also because the national programme of all children in Key Stage 1 receiving free school lunches and the London Mayor's initiative to extend this to all children in Key Stage 2 has reduced parents' incentive to also formally apply for FSMs. The impact is a reduction on pupil premium funding that is awarded to schools to support children with their educational outcomes who are eligible for FSMs on poverty grounds. In autumn 2024, the local authority commenced a system of automatically enrolling eligible children for free school meals to ensure these children were benefitting from both free school meals and pupil premium funding through their schools and to better reflect what is considered to be a somewhat hidden problem. This has resulted in an additional 558 children and young people to date being registered for FSMs/pupil premium.

7.3 *Educational outcomes across all phases*

Disadvantaged children in Brent (those who qualify for pupil premium) are achieving well compared to disadvantaged children nationally, as set out in a report to the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee entitled Annual School Standards and Achievement 2023-24 on 25 April 2025. The report showed that from early years to GCSE level, pupil attainment levels were above the national average, outlined in the Annual School Standards and Achievement [report](#).

This reflects the targeted work that Brent Early Years settings and schools are undertaking to reduce the attainment gaps for children who are impacted by poverty. The importance of children's earliest years in shaping future life chances is recognised as a government priority through programmes such as Family Hubs and Start for Life. We know that many children impacted by poverty are not ready for school and multi-agency work is ongoing to ensure school readiness. This includes current work to develop an Early Years Strategy that will support the health, school readiness, safeguarding and inclusion of all children and provide a universal and targeted framework of support from pre-birth to age 5.

To improve longer-term outcomes, the recent Government expectation of all local authorities is an increase in the number of all pupils who are achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) by the end of Reception. In Brent this means increasing the percentage of children achieving a GLD by 9% points from 68.3% in 2024/25 to 77.3% in 2027/28, which will require additional focus on children

who are at risk of not reaching this standard. This includes children who were born early or with a low birthweight, those not attending any early years education provision, children with EAL and children in specific wards (Wembley Central, Alperton, Tokyngton, Harlesden, Stonebridge and Dollis Hill). As set out in a detailed report to the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on 18 September 2024 entitled 'Early years provision and progress towards meeting the expansion of childcare entitlements', Brent is making progress in delivering the Government-driven expanded entitlements to childcare/early education and deploying capital investment to support growth and sustainability across the sector.

Schools mitigate the impacts of poverty on children's education using their pupil premium funding in different ways to address the disproportionality of outcomes, including commissioning mental health and wellbeing support for these pupils and opportunities for additional learning. Every school must publish their Pupil Premium Strategy on their website to show how the money is used to support children and the impact of previous activity funded by the Pupil Premium. Schools have a rigorous focus on disadvantaged children's attainment and achievement, including a focus on attendance and providing an important support system for families experiencing poverty through foodbanks, access to second hand uniforms and advice and guidance. The Local Authority is currently funding a school leadership training programme, the Brent Schools Race Equality Programme, aimed at ensuring an anti-racist culture is embedded in all Brent schools, to support the attainment of all underperforming groups.

The number of young people aged 16-18 who are not in Education, Employment and Training in Brent is low, standing at 94 males and 56 females across the borough as of October 2025. This remains a key priority in Brent as it supports breaking the poverty cycle. Schools provide a careers service to all young people. The Local Authority commissions a service delivered by the Shaw Trust (Prospects) that is targeted at young people who may need additional support, to ensure access to post-16 progression pathways, including information about further and high education, apprenticeships and employment.

7.4 *Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF)*

The Holiday Activities and Food programme (also known as HAF), that is funded by the Department for Education, is aimed at ensuring children and young people who are eligible for benefits-related FSMs can access free activities and healthy meals in the Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays. The programme is for eligible Reception to Year 11 who either live in Brent or attend a Brent school. 15% of funding can be used to fund places for children who are not eligible but would benefit from the programme, at the discretion of each local authority. In Brent this funding is used to support a variety of vulnerable children including children with SEND, low-income families, young carers, looked after children, children at risk of exclusion, refugees and unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). The

programme in summer 2025 reached around 2000 vulnerable children. While the programme is aimed at all age groups, efforts have been made to increase the participation of eligible secondary aged children, as well as children with SEND over recent years (see the table below).

Feedback from parents and children and young people accessing HAF is overwhelmingly positive:

“The food was amazing-trying new dishes was the best part of lunch.”

“I had so much fun at Go Ape-I was scared, but I did it anyway and felt so proud!”

“I used to be nervous about trying new things, but here I felt like I could. Now I feel stronger and I even helped my team. I can’t wait to keep playing sport after this.”

The table below shows the total attendance as of summer 2025:

	Total Attendance	SEND	KS3 and KS4
Easter 2023	1,525	12%	27.3%
Easter 2024	1,615	15.8%	32.5%
Easter 2025	1,627	17%	26.6%
Summer 2023	1,791	13.9%	26%
Summer 2024	1,882	15.3%	27.9%
Summer 2025	2,013	15%	29%
Christmas 2023	946	15.8%	21.3%
Christmas 2024	887	21.5%	27.4%

7.5 Families First Partnership Programme

The Families First Partnership Programme (FFPP) is a national children’s social care reform programme, which has been built on the findings of a number of national social care reviews that have been completed over recent years. The FFPP aims to rebalance the children’s social care system towards earlier intervention and prevention, making family support more seamless, and addressing care market challenges. For Brent this means bringing together universal, targeted early help and social care into a seamless offer of support and intervention for vulnerable families and prevent escalation into higher levels of need and statutory intervention. Our needs assessment recognises the need to support families who may come to the attention of the service with presenting needs that may also include children living in poverty.

7.6 Family Wellbeing Centres

Brent’s Family Wellbeing Centre (FWC) approach is centred around a universal ‘front door’ for families to access a wide range of early help and preventative services, including some targeted support. The FWCs provide an integrated ‘whole family’ (for children aged 0-18 years old, and 25 for those with SEND)

service, bringing together core health visiting, school nursing, under 5s services, parenting and family support services into a single offer. This arrangement helps the co-ordination and delivery of services for more vulnerable children.

The FWC triage service helps to achieve positive outcomes for children and families who require light touch interventions or short-term pieces of work with families who meet the criteria for Universal (Level 1) & Level 2 support. Over 2100 families were supported in 2024/25 through the triage service. The common presenting issues to the triage service include:

- Families re-locating from other areas with no resources (i.e. household goods, lack of finances, etc)
- Debt - including utilities, rent, council tax, etc
- Children not in school
- Cost of living related issues
- Housing - overcrowding/ evictions/ disrepairs
- New arrivals - including Ukrainian families, other asylum seekers
- Parents with children who have undiagnosed additional needs who require help to access specialist services.

Through a community partnership with Little Village, Family Wellbeing Centres support families with babies and young children living in poverty. Via their network of baby banks, they pass on pre-loved goods from one family to another; including clothes, toys and equipment, so that more babies and young children have the essential things they need to thrive. The FWCs also deliver a diverse suite of accredited parenting programmes and support that range from universal through to more specialist provision to support parents at differing ages and stages of their children's development and level of need. Each FWC also has a toy library where families can borrow up to 3 toys for 2 weeks at a time at nil cost. The service is expanding to address local needs and include more toys for SEND and older age groups.

The majority of the FWC receive food donations via the Felix project and food items were donated to families equating to over 50,000 meals during the year. Some FWC also receive non-food items from Felix such as toys, clothes and household items which are donated to families.

During the 2024-25 financial year 18,079 families were supported to achieve positive outcomes in the following areas relating to tackling poverty:

- Improved family finances and reducing the impact of the cost-of-living crisis
- Reduced numbers of families presenting as homeless, securing long term accommodation and reducing the threat of eviction
- Improved family nutrition, weight management and access to fresh fruit and vegetables
- Improving school attendance, punctuality and engagement with school, leading to better educational attainment

- Improved oral health and reducing teeth extraction for under 5s and support to improve parent/ carer and children's mental health and wellbeing
- Increasing families' engagement with early help, preventative and intervention services, including refugee/ asylum seekers and less heard from groups
- Improving parents' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, and soft skills leading to employment opportunities
- Increasing families' resilience to the impact of multiple disadvantages
- Supporting parents and young people into employment and to access educational and work experience opportunities
- Increased identification rates of young carers linking them into support and reducing the impact of caring responsibilities on CYP
- Support the improvement of children's school readiness, particularly ensuring children have good Speech Language and Communication
- Preventing family problems becoming more complex and entrenched by intervening earlier and providing the right support at the right time

7.7 *Child Health*

The Children's Trust, chaired by the Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Community Development, brings together colleagues from across the health sector, including the Integrated Care Board, and the local authority to focus on addressing the health and wellbeing inequalities of children and young people. A key focus has been on obesity, oral health and mental health and wellbeing, as well as the health and wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers and children and young people with SEND.

7.8 *Future Planning*

Through both a continued local focus on addressing child poverty working with partners and implementation of the national Child Poverty Strategy, the council will ensure that alleviating child poverty remains a priority across the council.

Alongside this, the council is focusing on improving economic, as well as health and wellbeing outcomes for all families through 4 key priorities in 2026:

1. A seamless offer of help for families
2. Giving every child the best start in life
3. Improving inclusion for all children and young people
4. Closing the employment and skills gap across the borough

8.0 **Monitoring and Indicators for 2026 and beyond**

- 8.1 While there are no clear gaps in Brent's existing services to support residents experiencing poverty, there is scope to sharpen focus and maximise impact. The latest Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), Brent's Social Progress Index (SPI), and Corporate Performance Scorecards provide a strong evidence base for prioritising resources. These tools allow the council to identify areas where deprivation is most acute, such as income insecurity, child poverty, and housing, and to monitor progress over time. By aligning interventions with these data-driven insights, the council can ensure that funding is directed to the wards

and groups that need it most, improving equity and resilience across the borough.

9.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Lead Members and partners have been consulted on the key strategies and approaches to tackling poverty, including the Borough Plan and other strategies and plans referenced in this report.

10.0 Financial Considerations

- 10.1 The Government's Best Start in Life initiatives, forming part of the national Child Poverty Strategy, provide a relevant funding and policy context for Brent's approach to addressing child poverty. The associated grant allocation for Brent (£5.6m) has been confirmed for the next three financial years, up to 2028/29 (£1.9m in 2026/27), providing a degree of medium-term financial certainty for local planning. These initiatives focus on reducing costs for families, increasing household incomes through measures such as free school meals and breakfast provision, improving access to childcare, and delivering more integrated family support.

In addition, Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme funding has also been confirmed for the same period, supporting continued provision during school holidays.

In June 2025, the government announced that from September 2026, free school meals will be extended to all children in households receiving Universal Credit. This is expected to further reduce cost pressures on families and support child poverty reduction within the borough.

- 10.2 £1m funding, spread across 2025/26 and 2026/27, has been agreed to support the delivery of the Radical Place Leadership Programme from the Public Health Grant Reserve. This funding will enable the testing of new, place-based initiatives related to prevention, with strong links to poverty reduction, including the establishment of a Neighbourhood Prevention Team in Harlesden. Simultaneously, the funding will be utilised to test out approaches to resident involvement and Community Power. For example, a new participatory grant making scheme has been established with partners Brent Giving, with a core focus on Poverty Reduction.

11.0 Legal Considerations

- 11.1 There are no direct legal implications arising out of this report, which provides members with a detailed overview of the current situation regarding progress, challenges and actions with respect to alleviating poverty in the Borough.

12.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

- 12.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty, as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have "due regard"

to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who have a “protected characteristic” and those who do not share that protected characteristic. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The council also passed a motion on November 18th, 2024, to internally recognise care experience as a protected characteristic.

- 12.2 Having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.

This report provides an overview of poverty in Brent and the council's wide-ranging actions to alleviate it. Tackling poverty is central to our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion, as set out in the EDI Strategy 2024–2028 and in our Borough Plan priorities. While the council does not have a single anti-poverty strategy, our approach is embedded across services and informed by data tools such as the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, and Social Progress Index to target support where it is most needed.

- 12.3 Poverty intersects with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, disproportionately affecting residents with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, and care experienced people. Our recent adoption of the Socio-Economic Duty strengthens our commitment to tackling poverty by ensuring socio-economic status is considered as an internally recognised protected characteristic in Equality Impact Assessments.

13.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 13.1 The council will continue to address issues around fuel poverty, as well as ensuring that people are living in warm and comfortable homes, through the climate emergency strategy.

14.0 Communication Considerations

- 14.1 The council will continue to communicate its policies to support residents experiencing poverty, including through the Resident Support Fund, Housing functions including the ‘Find a place you can afford’ campaign and support of young people and families through Family Wellbeing Centres.

Report sign off:

Tom Cattermole

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Nigel Chapman

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