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Brent

MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday 19 January 2026 at 6.00 pm

Held as a hybrid meeting in the Conference Hall – Brent Civic Centre

PRESENT: Councillor Ketan Sheth (Chair), Councillor Afzal (Vice Chair), and Councillors Aden, Clinton, Ethapemi, Mahmood and Mistry, and co-opted member Ms Rachelle Goldberg

In attendance: Councillor Muhammed Butt, Councillor Gwen Grahl

1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members

- Councillor Collymore
- Councillor Tazi Smith
- Archdeacon Catherine Pickford
- Mr Alloysius Frederick
- Jenny Cooper
- Councillor Knight

2. Declarations of interests

Personal interests were declared as follows:

- Councillor Ketan Sheth – Lead Governor of Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust.
- Councillor Ethapemi – spouse employed by NHS

3. Petitions (if any)

To request Brent Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to consider proposals to reduce the opening hours of Central Middlesex Urgent Treatment Centre

The Chair welcomed Zhenga Wellings-Longmore (as lead petitioner) to the meeting, who he advised was attending to present a petition requesting the Committee to consider proposals to reduce the opening hours of Central Middlesex Urgent Treatment Centre.

In thanking members for the opportunity to speak, Zhenga Wellings-Longmore advised of her roots within the Harlesden and Kensal Green community, where her grandchildren now lived and where she had three generations of family depending on services within the area, highlighting that she spoke from lived experience, memory, and a sense of responsibility for the future.

In outlining the petition, Ms Wellings-Longmore advised that she was speaking regarding the proposals to reduce the opening hours of the Urgent Treatment

Centre at Central Middlesex Hospital by three hours a day, equating to 21 hours a week. She highlighted that, on the ground, that meant real people being turned away, longer journeys for people needing the service late at night, and more pressure on already overstretched services elsewhere. She reminded the Committee of the decision in 2014 when the A&E department at Central Middlesex Hospital was closed following a decision by the Health Secretary at the time, where residents had been reassured that the Urgent Care Centre would mitigate the loss of A&E and act as a safe alternative. Subsequently in 2019, she highlighted that the reassurance was weakened when the overnight service was withdrawn and the opening hours reduced, which had been reluctantly accepted by local residents who had been assured that the service would still meet local need. Now residents were being asked to accept another significant reduction, with proposals to close the centre at 9pm compared to midnight, which she felt was a fundamental erosion of access to urgent healthcare.

In continuing to outline the concerns of the petitioners, Ms Wellings-Longmore highlighted that residents did not stop becoming ill or injured after 9pm, and concluded that a late-evening urgent care service was not a luxury but a necessity. She further highlighted that Brent's population was growing, not shrinking, so she felt it was difficult to understand why these proposals were being made following a 9.2% increase in population between 2011 and 2021, significantly higher than the national and London average. She added that the population was also ageing, with people living longer and having complex health needs. In addition, she highlighted the major developments coming on stream in Brent over the next few years in Grand Union, Alperton, Wembley Central and Neasden, where thousands more residents would move into the borough, but instead of planning for increased demand, residents were being asked to accept reduced access to urgent care.

In considering how the growing and ageing population would cope with reduced access, the petitioners highlighted that when services at Central Middlesex were cut, the pressure did not disappear but moved elsewhere, and Northwick Park Hospital A&E and Urgent Treatment Centre were already under enormous pressure. Petitioners predicted that the reduced hours at Central Middlesex would push more people towards Northwick Park, increasing waiting times and reducing the chances of people being seen quickly when they needed it most. She also foresaw that people may not go to hospital when they needed to if access became too difficult, resulting in conditions worsening when what could have been treated early became an emergency later.

Ms Wellings-Longmore affirmed that, due to the reasons outlined, the petitioners were firmly opposed to any further reduction in services at Central Middlesex Hospital, and asked for transparency, accountability and democratic oversight moving forward. The petitioners called on Brent Council to call an urgent meeting of the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee so that the proposals could be properly examined, questioned and debated. In requesting this scrutiny, Ms Wellings-Longmore highlighted precedent for this, referring to the scrutiny committee consideration of changes to the service on 9 July 2019, allowing councillors and residents the opportunity to scrutinise the impact of the reduction in

hours and ensure local voices were heard. They hoped for that same opportunity to be afforded now to consider the impact of the reduction on local residents.

In summing up, Ms Wellings-Longmore affirmed that the petition was about people and fairness, recognising that communities such as Harlesden, Kensal Green and the wider Brent area deserved accessible and reliable urgent healthcare, and not the slow erosion of services that residents were seeing that she felt had been cut back too far, highlighting that once services were gone it was very difficult to get them back. She expressed she made this plea for her neighbours, children and grandchildren, and people who worked late, cared for others, and relied on public healthcare. She drew her remarks to close asking the Chair to convene a scrutiny committee to consider these proposals and stand up for residents.

In response, the Chair thanked Zhenga Wellings-Longmore and others for attending the Committee to ensure the views of the petitioners were represented. In noting the request for the Committee to consider the proposals to reduce opening hours at Central Middlesex Hospital Urgent Care Centre, he confirmed that the Committee had reviewed the proposals at previous Committee meetings with senior representatives from London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust and were monitoring the impact of the changes going forward.

4. Deputations (if any)

There were no deputations received.

5. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2025 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

6. Matters arising (if any)

There were no matters arising.

7. Emergency Planning and Update on Casey Review

Councillor Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council) introduced the report, thanking all partners involved for being part of this process. He felt that the progress made since 2020 and the work done to improve emergency planning and protect residents and businesses through collaboration and partnership demonstrated the commitment to ensuring a situation such as the disorder of the Euro 2020 final never happened again. He added that this work would always be a work in progress as there was always new improvements that could be made, but felt that the tangible improvements being seen were a testament to the commitment all partners had made to ensuring Brent remained a safe borough for everyone, including visitors.

Jehan Weerasinghe (Corporate Director Neighbourhoods and Regeneration, Brent Council) added that the report addressed key questions in terms of what the findings of the review were and how they had been implemented on the ground. He highlighted the statutory responsibility the Council and partners had in ensuring

safety to, from and during events and the commitment to ensuring Wembley Stadium was the most welcoming venue for people who came from across the world. He felt that all actions that the team had put into place in effective partnership with the Metropolitan Police, British Transport Police, FA and other partners showed the solid, singular dedication to the safety of citizens to ensure they left the world-class venue having had a great experience and left safe.

Chris Whyte (Director of Public Realm, Brent Council) introduced other colleagues present to respond to questions and asked Tom Legg (Director of External Operations, Wembley Stadium – FA) to present the improvements that had been made at the Stadium over the last 5 years.

Tom Legg then made a presentation, highlighting the following key points:

- In response to the Casey Review, Wembley National Stadium Limited (WNSL), Brent Council, Wembley Park Ltd, and the Metropolitan Police had worked collaboratively to meet the recommendations to improve the local and spectator experience within Wembley on event days, including:
 - Improved accessible pass gates on Level 1 of the stadium concourse, securely reinforced to prevent unauthorised entry and complying with Disability Discrimination Act guidance.
 - Physical external security perimeters to minimise impact on crowd flows, compliant with Hostile Vehicle Mitigation (HVM) measures.
 - Advanced oversight of safety and security plans and identified risks, relayed to the Health and Safety FA Board representatives for discussion and approval.
 - Peer reviews by leading crowd safety experts to undertake a ‘health check’ of event day processes, with the Stadium scoring 94.3% on average, and two further independent reviews of CCTV coverage across partners and neighbouring deployments to reinforce event day measures and ensure all aspects of event day security, safety and counter terrorism were thoroughly reviewed.
 - Continued staff feedback from stewarding agencies following each event, and a permanently employed second Deputy Safety Officer for Stadium Event Days. Since 2022, the Stadium has also deployed a higher volume of security stewards compared to previous years.
- Additional measures following the implementation of the Casey Review recommendations have also been implemented, including:
 - Implementation of an outer Door Security Perimeter for the UEFA Champions League Final 2024, an Event of National Significance, which was subject to detailed crowd flow analysis, fencing prototype testing and stakeholder engagement between Zone Ex and Safety Advisory Group (SAG) stakeholders following a successful trial at five events prior to the Final. The perimeter provided a precedent for the deployment of an Outer Security Perimeter at future Events of National Significance.

- Continued enhancements to secure the stadium perimeter, including installation of new security gates and rolling shutters at access points.
- Continued CCTV deployment improvements, additional 10X CCTV screens in Zone Ex to increase monitoring, and CCTV maintenance and system upgrades.
- Through the establishment of Zone Ex and the Best in Class approach now being taken, the following improvements had been made:
 - Development of an in-house Zone Ex Coordination Centre providing a control room base for WNSL, Brent Council, Wembley Park Ltd, TfL, Transport Operating Companies, National Highways, and traffic and external operations contractors, uniting all Zone Ex stakeholders in one place to manage activity on the external footprint.
 - A communications strategy across partners now ensured the message of zero tolerance for ASB was extended across Wembley, with the Stadium, Council and Wembley Park Ltd also providing additional infrastructure measures to emphasise the PSPO messaging on event days and digital wayfinding signage.
 - Enforcement of the PSPO, including the prohibition of ASB, sale/resale of tickets, consumption of alcohol in open spaces and licenced areas, public urination, flying of drones, access of unauthorized vehicles, and sale of merchandise.
 - Prohibition of the sale of alcohol in the local area on event days and designated fan zones acted as key drivers to improve fan behaviours in Zone Ex.
 - 'Alpha Zulu' stewards reinforce to visitors the prohibition of alcohol on arrival at Wembley Park, with up to 100 stewards deployed on the footprint depending on the Met Police event risk rating.
 - Temporary toilet facilities have been implemented across Wembley Park to reduce public urination on event days, with improved, high-capacity modular toilet units that were easy to install, energy efficient and independent of a mains power / water supply.
 - Zone Ex areas are now suitably protected with fencing resources where gaps were identified in a Crowd Egress Management Plan in 2022, with protected Resident Quiet Zones.
 - WNSL secured a 365-day/year premises licence for the 'East Village' to act as fan zones, providing capacity for up to 4,000 spectators with designated drinking areas.
 - Zone Ex action days took place on an annual basis bringing together Zone Ex stakeholders to ensure responsibilities and procedures are readily known for stakeholders to respond to a range of different event intel or incidents.
- New initiatives in progress for 2026 and beyond include:
 - Event enforcement recategorization, amending the risk ratings of events to correspond to the enforcement priority of the event.

- Continuing to look for a permanent secondary fan zone site that can match the capacity of the East Village.
- S106 commitments following the approval of Brent Planning Committee to allow for 54 major stadium events per year to provide £150k for TfL towards CCTV and signage upgrades around Wembley Park Station, £100k towards a transport study and £200k towards any recommended improvements arising from that, monetary contributions towards Brent Council's operational costs for all events with an expected attendance greater than 51,000 and additional £15k for each major event after event 46, and up to £200k towards CCTV maintenance and system upgrades around the Stadium.

Peter Dearden (Chief Inspector – MO6 Public Order Command, Metropolitan Police) addressed the pillars of work the Metropolitan Police were focused on during event days, including; precision targeting of drug taking; seizure of alcohol, with 16,000 alcohol seizures in 2025 alone; and football banning order rates, which he highlighted were increasing and targeting the right people committing the most serious offences and keeping them away from all football across the country. He agreed that the relationships were very mature across the various partners, and in particular commended the Council's PSPO Enforcement and deployment of officers to address violence against women and girls.

The Chair thanked colleagues for their introduction and invited comments and questions from those present, with the following points raised:

The Committee was pleased to hear that partners recognised their statutory duties to keep all visitors and local residents safe and the efforts to work collaboratively across partners to implement improvements. They asked whether partners were reassured that all of the recommendations from the Baroness Casey Review had now been implemented and were confident that all partners were totally equipped to take the right actions in an emergency. In terms of responding to the recommendations of the Casey Review, Chris Whyte advised that he was very satisfied that partners had complied with those fully, particularly in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and implementation of regulatory controls around the sale of alcohol to football fans, which had been a contributing factor to the disorder at the Euros final. Local business had been very willing to comply with the ban on sales of alcohol, and a PSPO had been introduced to prohibit the drinking of alcohol in public areas. He felt these controls had served to help reach a situation where the levels of ASB and disorder had fallen away since that event. Baroness Casey had subsequently revisited her recommendations and been satisfied that partners had complied with them. In relation to security threats, particularly in response to references to vehicles mounting pavements, he pointed out that the Wembley Zone Ex footprint was encircled by Hostile Vehicle Mitigation Measures which were an integral part of the infrastructure. Tom Legg agreed that partners were ready to take the correct actions in the event of an emergency, highlighting collaboration and the right resourcing plans providing the ability to cope with most scenarios. Mark Lynch (Stadium Director – FA) added that the Wembley Assurance Group had been formed, with Baroness Casey chairing that group, which was made up of representation from Brent Council, FA, Wembley Stadium, Metropolitan Police, Home Office, DCMS, Government Stakeholders and TfL, convening on an

annual basis to review the previous years' events and understand challenges, key learning and take a forward look towards Euros 2028. In terms of what had been discussed at the most recent meeting, Mark Lynch advised that members had reviewed transport challenges from the previous years' events, looked at changes in football behaviour, particularly fan marches and how they were dealt with at the stadium and across London, and planning into 2028, particularly looking at fan zones and screenings across London. Tom Legg added that the FA was proud of the achievements made but recognised that there was a continuous improvement commitment and partners would keep refining plans to ensure that what was deployed to every event was fit for purpose to appropriately suit the nature of the risk presented.

Peter Dearden added that the tailgating legislation currently going through parliament would assist in target hardening the infrastructure to deal with some of the problems Baroness Casey had identified. He recognised that resourcing levels was a specific issue raised by the review, and the Police now ensured they attended very early on event days and stayed as long as necessary, acknowledging that there was crime in the wider area that may need to be addressed and allowing that longer window of deployment. By way of example, he advised that 5,500 officers had been deployed to summer concerts alone, which he felt showed the Met Police commitment to making the environment safe and secure. In terms of ensuring all partners were ready should an emergency occur, he advised that the testing exercises provided comfort that processes were in place to respond to incidents, and added that all police commanders working at Wembley Stadium events were CBRN and NTA trained, meaning the officers posted to event days were fully equipped to deal with those types of emergencies should there be a need.

Noting recent events in Birmingham where fans had been denied entry to watch their team play, the Committee asked whether that was at the discretion of the police command and what level of resourcing police deployed to events. Peter Dearden advised that he was unable to comment on the West Midlands police case. He confirmed there were low, medium and high risk ratings, as well as elevated risk at an event of national significance, which was unique to the national stadium, and the police understood that this was the highest profile stadium hosting the highest profile events, and there was a need to resource to that level of risk. A specific algorithm was used to understand what resourcing levels were needed, recognising that this needed to take into account the time someone left their home, travelled to the stadium and returned home. As well as resource numbers, there were tactical options available to bring risk down that could be deployed, and he was confident that, with the combined experience and expertise of all partners involved, the risks could be met and mitigated.

In recognising the work of partners to implement the recommendations from the Casey review and drive improvements, the Committee asked how partners understood whether the measures being taken were successful. Tom Legg advised that a considerable amount of time was spent ensuring that the Stadium was collecting the right data after each event. This included tracking the number of enforcement actions taken against the audience on event days, which should illustrate that the amount of enforcement activity was reducing and therefore that resources and measures put in place were working. There was a commitment to continue to collect and track that data on enforcement impact. In terms of the

boundary of that data, Tom Legg confirmed that this was primarily collected across Zone Ex, but the Stadium also collected data from other delivery agencies including British Transport Police, TfL, train companies, and quarterly meetings with resident groups to collect information and feedback. For 2026, the FA was also looking to introduce the ability for resident groups to be able to upload specific issues happening in their wards in real time so that they could be responded to in a specific way.

The Committee highlighted that, whilst the outcomes from the implementation of the Casey review recommendations had been alluded to, there had been no data included in the report to support that. They added it was difficult to judge the effectiveness of the improvements without the impact included in the report. Tom Legg acknowledged the challenge and advised that he was keen to discuss the data collected and show the positive trajectory from improvements, but would need to check with partner organisations sourcing the data whether it was open data that could be shared. In recognising that, the Committee advised that the data provided could be in a more over-arching, digestible format and not granular, providing Key Performance Indicators and measuring the progress of those. Tom Legg agreed to take an action considering how best to represent impact data and come back to the Committee for a future review. The Committee asked that this also included sentiment analysis and feedback from residents as well as the enforcement actions undertaken around ASB and alcohol seizures.

The Committee noted that the last multi-agency exercise was in January 2024, and felt that 2 years was a long time between exercises, suggesting that there was a need for the multi-agency to meet more often given the number of events the Stadium would now be holding annually. Chris Whyte confirmed that tabletop exercises were carried out frequently both internally within the Council's own operations and jointly across the partners involved in event days, highlighting that the Stadium professionally hosted these exercises which included scenario planning.

The Committee noted the substantial investment towards TfL CCTV installation around Wembley Park Station, but raised concerns that issues did not always take place within the boundary of the event zone but on tube links and local areas. They asked whether there were enough resources in place to recognise and deal with issues outside of the event zone. Tom Legg highlighted that one of the investments made through the delivery of the Zone Ex Co-ordination Centre was posting TfL officers within the control room to act as the liaison between the Stadium Control Room and TfL's main operating centre, meaning that there was visibility of what was happening on the entire TfL network. Other transport providers were also co-located so that, in the event of an issue in the wider transport network, the control room was immediately aware and could put appropriate plans in place to mitigate any risks.

The Chair invited Councillor Rita Conneely, who had attended the meeting in her capacity as Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee, to contribute to the discussion. She asked what work was being done to fit in to larger strategies around ASB and crime prevention as a whole. Chris Whyte responded that the main tool to address that on event days was the PSPO that fit within the wider suite of enforcement controls available across the whole of the borough, which was seen as best in class for large stadium events. He added that other large

stadiums across the country were looking to this approach to adopt something similar. CCTV was also deployed on event days which was felt to be a crucial element, in collaboration with the police to get that right. Simon Finney (Head of Neighbourhood Management, Brent Council) added that there had been investment into the CCTV around the Wembley Park estate with cameras that could track and focus on incidents, alert operators when there were issues with cameras, and use multi-sensor technology. Outside of event days enforcement teams regularly dealt with ASB matters as part of their day-to-day operations.

Brent Youth Parliament Representatives were also welcomed to the meeting and invited to contribute. Representatives highlighted that there was a high concentration of young people moving in and out of the Wembley Park area during event days in order to attend schools or the civic centre, and as such they felt there was a large risk to young people. One representative provided an example of having been walking home from school during the peak of the Euro 2020 events and having a beer bottle thrown at them. In outlining these issues, the representatives raised concerns that the advisory groups detailed within the report were not consulting young people in conducting their reviews and improvement programmes, and requested that Zone Ex consulted schools and young people in the area, who they felt shouldered the burden of the increased activity and ASB in the area. They also highlighted the need for better provision of transport links with TfL to prevent increased risk to young people, highlighting that lack of bus routes on event days lead to young girls walking home alone. In concluding, they asked partners where they had consulted young people, and whether they would commit to consulting young people going forward. Chris Whyte acknowledged the concerns raised, agreeing that consultation with young people was an area to develop, and in relation to the specific personal experiences shared agreed to pass those on to the Stadium who had a very strong regime to ensure safeguarding was given full attention. He took away a commitment to develop that conversation with young people so that their views and experiences were taken into account. Peter Dearden added that an Independent Advisory Group with representation from every stadium in London convened quarterly and it may be appropriate to invite BYP to those meetings in order to guide that group in terms of safety and security. He agreed to look into what opportunities young people had as a touchpoint for the local police with the local neighbourhood teams and reporting issues in the moment.

Brent Youth Parliament also felt that young people were not reaping the benefits of living in the borough through complimentary tickets to events, work experience opportunities and visits to the Stadium, highlighting that some people had lived in Brent all their lives but never visited the Stadium. Mark Lynch responded that 58,000 tickets had been distributed to local residents last year, which represented a 64% increase from the year before. The Stadium had also hosted over 100 students from 8 primary schools in December 2025 at the Wembley Pitch Day, who had been able to play football on the pitch, and seen 1,000 people from the local community attend Stadium tours, which included young people. In relation to employment opportunities, the Stadium worked with the King's Trust to provide local young people work experience opportunities at Wembley, 14 of which had subsequently secured employment with the FA or as Wembley Stadium contractors. He also drew attention to the new Brent Giving charity that the FA was partnering on, which would announce its first grant programme worth £80k at the end of the month that local community organisations could bid for.

The Committee asked whether there were any other areas partners felt were not working and required improvements. Tom Legg felt that there was work that could be done to improve the way pre-event information was provided, and the FA was carefully reviewing some technology applications they could utilise to better prepare local residents and businesses of upcoming event impact. Another way to get better at ensuring local residents and businesses were aware of events coming up was to better liaise with different local groups. Some of this work, such as better co-ordination with local community groups, could be done in a short timeframe, but the tech solution for event information was linked with the development of the Wembley Stadium app which had a medium-term timeline. The Committee asked that a timeline was shared with the Committee that enabled members to review actions against the timeline to see how actions were progressing. They also asked for key themes coming out of the engagement piece with local residents, businesses, schools and groups to be shared with the Committee to provide a holistic picture of the key issues. Tom Legg agreed to take away those actions, highlighting that he was proud of the establishment of the resident group, which had met in December with good positivity around that group. He could share the minutes of that meeting with the Committee.

From Chris Whyte's perspective, he felt that the main large area of outstanding improvement needed was around traffic and parking on event days. The Committee challenged whether the Council having its own car parks available on event days helped the situation, and Chris Whyte acknowledged that this could encourage people to drive to events, but added that Fryent Country Park was only used for very exceptional occasions, and there was work underway to promote the public transport message and review traffic. Tom Legg added that the FA had committed to spend £100k on a detailed transport study for the West of the estate, and an additional £200k on mitigation measures in consultation with the Highways Team at Brent based on the findings of that study.

The Committee felt that, in addition to the mitigations that took place on event days to deal with issues as they happened, there was also a responsibility on the FA to have year-round communications with all teams to ensure they knew what their responsibilities were and could disseminate information to fans. Tom Legg responded that the FA was clear on its position that those in football had a collective responsibility to improve fan behaviour. The FA had invested heavily in recent years to drive specific communications programmes designed to improve fan behaviour, but it was highlighted that this could only be achieved together, so there was a large amount of collaboration across all levels of football both at the professional level and grassroots.

Further discussing resident engagement, the Committee asked what feedback the FA was hearing from residents from the various methods of engagement they were undertaking. Tom Legg advised that he chaired a Wembley Stadium Resident Association Group which received a range of different feedback from each event held at the stadium, and the majority of feedback pointed to the improved communications piece in terms of event days. Some feedback also pointed to better calibrating the way events were resourced and delivered, and he highlighted that it was difficult to ensure that the appropriate level of mitigation measures were in place given that the events delivered at the national stadium were very different by nature, and the resourcing that might be deployed for concerts in the summer months would be very different from the resources deployed for an FA Cup final. He

advised that all partners worked hard to ensure the enforcement measures being deployed were appropriate and aligned to the detailed risk assessments and risk ratings and categories of those events, which took time, co-ordination, accurate data, and feedback from the residents to get right. In response to whether there were any areas partners were looking to scale back measures, Tom Legg added that the approach to Best in Class and Zone Ex was to have the foundation blocks in place, such as toilet units, which were imperative for the delivery of every event, and then ensure resourcing levels were geared towards either safeguarding to protect young audiences or designed to mitigate the risk of ASB.

Noting reference in the report to Corporate Gold and Silver under section 1.3.16, the Committee asked how this was determined. Jehan Weerasinghe advised that this concerned the level of seniority of officer response, with himself and Chris Whyte at Gold Level and Heads of Service and middle managers at Silver Level.

In concluding the discussion, the Committee asked how assured the Council was that the co-operation between multi-agency partners sufficiently prepared organisations to respond to emergency situations on event days. Chris Whyte responded that he was very proud of the arrangements in place to ensure safe and secure events in and around the Stadium. He highlighted that the control room was very high tech and supported by the Council's own control room, and the measures in place across all partners ensured that the delivery of events were Best in Class.

As no further issues were raised, the Chair drew the discussion to close and invited the Committee to make recommendations with the following RESOLVED:

- i) To recommend that partners involved in delivering safe and secure events at Wembley Stadium engaged children and young people in their arrangements in order to understand the specific issues affecting children and young people on event days. This could include representation from children and young people on advisory boards.
- ii) For future reviews to Committee to include impact data from the improvement actions.

A number of information requests were also made during the discussion, recorded as follows:

- i) To receive a timeline for future improvement actions.
- ii) To receive the minutes of the most recent resident engagement meeting.
- iii) To receive an outline of the themes and issues being raised during resident engagement events.

8. Tackling Poverty in Brent

Councillor Gwen Grahl (as Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Employment and Education) introduced the report, which provided an update on Brent Council's progress and challenges in implementing commitments relating to poverty reduction, cost-of-living support, housing and child poverty alleviation. In introducing the report from a children's services perspective, she advised that child poverty was

a key priority within the department as it affected everything the service delivered, and officers spent a lot of time thinking about the issue and what more could be done in the area. The Council had recently made a submission to the Government's Child Poverty Task Force who were looking for recommendations. She highlighted that giving every child the best start in life needed to include tackling the root causes of poverty and equip children with the resources they needed to thrive. She drew members attention to the report, which outlined some of the department's significant initiatives to do that, including Family Wellbeing Centres which she described as vital hubs where families could access an array of support including benefits advice, healthcare advice and parental guidance, which had reached over 18,000 families the previous year. She also listed Free School Meals (FSMs) as a cornerstone of addressing child poverty, with 25.1% of children in Brent eligible to receive FSMs. She felt that the Mayor's commitment to providing FSMs to all primary school pupils in London had also been hugely impactful. Alongside FSMs, pupils were also eligible for pupil premium, which was money provided to schools to enhance those children's education, and the Council had now set up auto-enrolment for that to ensure none of those children slipped through the net. She advised members of the holiday, activities and food (HAF) programme which she was proud of and felt acted as a lifeline for families during school holidays, as well as the voucher scheme for food which would be protected until 2027. Looking ahead, priorities would include the implementation of the National Strategy on Child Poverty, which would involve developing free breakfast clubs, extension of childcare entitlements, and expanding FSMs for all households on Universal Credit from September 2026. In detailing the steps being taken to alleviate child poverty, she added that these measures could not happen alone, as housing issues were now the main mechanism through which young people's lives became uncertain, with one child in every class in Temporary Accommodation, statistically. The scale of this was outlined in section 7.1 of the report, which detailed that Brent child poverty rates were at an average of 41%, compared to the London average of 35%, considering housing costs within that calculation. If housing costs were removed, the poverty rate sat at 20%, showing the impact of housing costs on poverty. She concluded her introduction by expressing her desire for a national strategy to build a new generation of social housing and solutions to ending the crisis of Temporary Accommodation.

Nigel Chapman (Corporate Director Children, Young People and Community Development, Brent Council) added that one of the Council's protective factors against poverty for future generations was improved education for young people across the borough to equip them with good jobs for the future, emphasising the strong performance of schools in the borough, with all secondary schools in Brent rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted. Children from more deprived backgrounds in Brent were shown to perform better than the national average, showing that the services in place and the work of schools was helping to mitigate the effects of poverty on young people's achievements.

Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director, Housing and Residents Services, Brent Council) provided an introduction from a resident services perspective. He reminded members that the Poverty Commission that was undertaken in 2020 gave Brent Council a clear framework for tackling poverty in the borough, but added that the landscape had changed significantly since then. He advised that the report outlined the pressures being faced, including the rise in demand for Temporary Accommodation and the number of families struggling with essentials including

food, fuel and rent. The support provided by Resident Services had been focused on alleviating those pressures, providing improved employment support, early help for families through strengthening financial assistance, and investing in affordable homes. He highlighted that the approach being taken was compassionate and practical and combined immediate support, such as through Brent Hubs, the Resident Support Fund and Emergency Grants, with long term actions on skills, housing and prevention.

In drawing the introduction to close, Andrew Phillips (Strategy Lead – Policy, Brent Council) drew members' attention to the Social Progress Index (SPI) tool which had been recently published and supported the monitoring of data, enabling the Council to identify gaps in the poverty offer, which was further supported by the government's recently published Multiple Indices of Deprivation which now considered housing.

The Chair thanked presenters for their introduction and invited comments and questions from those present, with the following issues raised:

The Chair invited Brent Youth Parliament to lead the discussion. Brent Youth Parliament was pleased that the report recognised the lack of vocational outcomes and opportunities for well paid local work for residents, which they identified as very important to young people right now. They asked what action was taking place specifically for young people, aside from workshops or careers fairs which most young people felt did not directly cater to their needs, to help young people into opportunities, how many people were able to secure jobs from those fares, and how young people were being consulted in these processes. They advocated for more local or borough specific degree apprenticeships for young people, adding that many young people were interested in the Council's audit service. Councillor Grahl agreed that there was a need for more opportunities in the borough, particularly apprenticeships. In her new portfolio role she had undertaken a review of jobs and skills in Brent with an external consultant who had made a number of recommendations, including to set up a local Skills and Employment Board made up of different stakeholders from across the borough to look carefully at the offer and contribute to it, which was being worked towards. She also wanted to look at the different Key Performance Indicators which she did not feel had been done consistently in the past. In terms of opportunities for work experience, Nigel Chapman added that it had been the responsibility of schools for the past 10 years to organise careers advice and work experience for young people, but he felt that the effectiveness of this varied between schools. As part of the review, he would be making an offer to local schools to co-ordinate work experience opportunities across Brent so that a more consistent offer could be provided.

The Chair asked officers to elaborate on how the Council used its links with other stakeholders to drive opportunities in order to offer a more holistic offer, such as through the Mayor's Academy, Wembley Stadium, University of West London and NHS providers. Nigel Chapman advised that the Council's employment service, Brent Works, had good links to those partners and delivered a high number of work placements for Brent's population. This offer was not specific to young people, but there were good connections with NHS and other medium sized local employers. He

agreed to provide data on how many young people who attended jobs fairs had subsequently secured employment.

Brent Youth Parliament also highlighted the barriers of Temporary Accommodation, particularly as people were being moved large distances away from Brent. They highlighted that this had an impact on young people during their crucial school years, with many not taking their GCSEs as a result or not continuing on to post-16 education due to the distances they needed to travel to continue their education. They asked whether the Council would consult young people experiencing long term Temporary Accommodation on its impact, and whether the Council would publicise the number of young people moved beyond Brent, London and the M25 circle during their GCSE and A-Level period. Tom Cattermole assured members that the Council did attempt to place families as close to Brent as possible, but were not always successful because the level of demand did not match the level of supply. He highlighted that the ultimate success story for the Council would be for every family on the Temporary Accommodation (TA) list to have a permanent residence. The Council had learned from families in TA that the most unsettling type of accommodation was bed and breakfast, so the Council did prioritise single units as opposed to B&B, and, given the demand and cost, those units were not always available in Brent. There were around 800 social housing units coming on stream for the Council in the upcoming financial year, but he highlighted that housing supply was a London crisis with every borough facing similar challenges. The Council continued to try to minimise the impact to families by prioritising local places, including taking into account if there were school aged children due to undertake exams, but the main priority was to get people into safe and suitable accommodation. Palvinder Kudhail (Director of Early Help and Social Care, Brent Council) added that Family Wellbeing Centres provided advice and information, including debt advice, and advocated on behalf of the families by speaking to the housing department about location and schooling to try to maintain continuity for young people where they were at exam stages.

Brent Youth Parliament recognised the challenges outlined and that the long term solution was for increased supply of affordable housing, but highlighted that in the shorter term young people should have their voices directly represented in order for the Council to understand the unique impact TA had on young people. For example, young people in TA advocated for receiving travel vouchers so that they could afford travelling to and from school and needed a place to voice that proposal. Brent Youth Parliament also asked the Council to consider moving people around to maintain young people in crucial moments of their education specifically, formalising an obligation to prioritise local places for those types of young people.

Brent Youth Parliament further commented, highlighting a gap in provision in relation to Free School Meals for young people aged 16-19, particularly with the loss of Educational Maintenance Allowance packages. They urged the Council to release frameworks or advice about how FSMs should be implemented across schools. They added that Tower Hamlets Council had reinstated EMA and reported a decreased burden on the Council as a result. They suggested that FSMs could be redirected to young people who had lost that EMA in Brent. Nigel Chapman advised that the FSM provision was funded through the GLA for primary schools, and the Council was not

in a position to extend that to secondary schools or beyond. If the financial situation changed then this could be looked into.

In concluding their challenge, Brent Youth Parliament asked how the Council would respond to the youth policies outlined in the National Youth Strategy, which included providing youth services to tackle poverty. Nigel Chapman advised that the National Youth Strategy had been published the previous month, with Brent children's services currently reviewing the strategy alongside the Council's own Youth Strategy which had been published in 2025. One practical thing that the Council had committed to was spending £4-5m towards improving youth facilities across the borough, with 5 centres set to benefit over the next two years to help provide young people with a space for activities. The Council was working with the voluntary sector on the delivery of that.

The Chair then invited Councillor Rita Conneely, as Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee, to contribute to the discussion. In opening her remarks, Councillor Conneely thanked Brent Youth Parliament for keeping a focus on Temporary Accommodation, which she highlighted as one of the greatest financial risks to the Council and to Councils across the country. In relation to children's services as a whole, she recognised some of the work being done, particularly the father's residential programme at the Gordon Brown Centre, and commended the Council for using those assets, but highlighted that these types of offers were highly dependent on grants. She asked where the Council's ability to bring in grants lay to address some of the issues outlined in the poverty commission, and where there were gaps that the Council recognised as local need, but which were not recognised nationally as requiring investment. Nigel Chapman responded that the local government finance settlement had been announced just before Christmas and was still being worked through, but he was happy to see there had been an increase in the Council's grant funded position for 2026-27 and over a longer, three-year period to support early intervention and prevention. He hoped to use that to introduce new provision not already in place, for example support for children and young people outside of the home at risk of harm through gang related activity, or family therapy for children and young people struggling with parental relationships. The Council had not yet set the budget for 2026-27, so the department was working at pace with finance colleagues to put a three-year programme in place.

Noting that the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee had previously made recommendations in relation to the poverty commission, including to work with food banks to develop a food strategy and the implementation of breakfast and afterschool clubs, the Committee asked what had been developed following those recommendations. Nigel Chapman advised that the government had released new funding for the provision of breakfast and afterschool clubs. In relation to the food strategy, Tom Pickup advised that the programme had moved to the Public Health Team, who were not present at the meeting, but he confirmed that they had dedicated resource to drive that work forward. He agreed to reach out to the Public Health Team to provide an update on that work.

In relation to young people not in education, employment and training, the Committee asked whether the Council had looked into developing an education business partnership with secondary schools and local businesses, similar to what was done in Hounslow and Tower Hamlets. Councillor Grahl advised that there were a number of

different supported pathways, outlined in paragraph 4.2 of the report, helping people back into work, including young people. Brent Start and Brent Works were the two main employment programmes directly funded by the Council for jobs and skills, and she was looking into setting up a local Board for stakeholders around this. Noting that Brent Youth Parliament had advocated for more apprenticeships for young people, she asked Brent Youth Parliament to be involved in that local Board once it was set up. Nigel Chapman added that there was greater levels of economic inactivity amongst females in Brent, so a strand of this work was to attempt to improve greater female economic activity.

Noting that there were many facets contributing to poverty, the Committee asked how intersectional the Council's approach was to understanding and dealing with poverty in Brent. Nigel Chapman responded that the data available to the Council now did provide a rich source of information, with the latest Indices of Multiple Deprivation by super output areas published before Christmas providing a good sense of where things had changed over the years. This included an understanding and breakdown by ethnicity and gender as well. He added that now that the data was available, the next step was to analyse, utilise and target that data to improve outcomes. It was clear that those areas requiring most attention and support were still the areas that the Council would expect, in Harlesden, Stonebridge and Dollis Hill. Tom Pickup added that, whilst the Indices of Multiple Deprivation provided one layer of data, the Council had also developed its Social Progress Index (SPI) looking at advantage and disadvantage in different ways across different communities. There was also work through the Radical Place Leadership (RPL) Programme looking at providing support and solutions at a neighbourhood level. That work was currently focused in Harlesden, an area of greater social deprivation, and used data to understand the demographics of those most disadvantaged and what the different facets contributing to that disadvantage was, in order to come up with solutions through Integrated Neighbourhood Teams made up of both Council departments and partner organisations. He highlighted that this was emerging work starting in Harlesden that would then be broadened out following learning. Palvinder Kudhail added that children's services work around intersectionality was often done when working with families. For example, Family Wellbeing Centres offered a triage service, conducting assessments for every family to inform the approach to responded to that family based on their individual need and how they wanted to receive services.

Noting the comments about housing being a contributing factor to deprivation in the borough, the Committee raised the prevalence of illegal subletting as an issue, highlighting that those properties were then not available to people in need. They queried how the Council managed existing assets to ensure they were used by the people who needed them. Tom Cattermole advised that the landlord licensing scheme was the main mechanism the Council had to counteract illegal subletting, and that scheme would be going borough wide. The Landlord Licensing Forum aimed to work with landlords on the quality of housing and the legality of what they were renting, and the Council often had whistleblowers informing the Private Rented Sector (PRS) Team of subletting, alongside area tenancy managers and councillors. Every case reported to the PRS Team was investigated by the Audit and Fraud Team. There was also the tenancy verification audit process which audited all tenancies across the borough, starting with vulnerable tenants, which should also identify any illegal subletting.

Raising the issue of quality of accommodation provided by private landlords, the Committee asked how the Council balanced the need to increase private housing against landlords taking advantage. Tom Cattermole advised that the LHA rates dictated what the Council could pay for temporary accommodation, so cautioned against any private landlords using the Council as an excuse to increase rents because the Council could not afford that, which was resulting in the need to source properties outside of the borough. In response to how the Council would deliver the target of 5,000 new Council homes, he agreed to speak with the regeneration team for an update.

The Committee highlighted that the table outlined in section 3.2.6 had a four-year data gap, and asked whether it was comprehensive enough to ascertain the levels of poverty. Andrew Phillips explained that the headline picture from that table, which used data from the national Indices of Multiple Deprivation, was that deprivation had worsened across the borough. He attributed the main driver of that to the inclusion of housing costs in the formula being used nationally, which played a huge role in the increase in poverty numbers. He recognised that the national index did not cover all aspects of poverty, and Brent had an opportunity to use the SPI which held Brent specific data, allowing officers and members of the public to look at more granular indicators affecting poverty.

Members highlighted the inequality amongst wards in terms of Council tax support, noting that those in the south of the borough received substantially more support and asked for further information as to why that was. Tom Cattermole explained that the top 5 wards receiving Council tax support correlated to the top 5 wards receiving 13a hardship awards, suggesting this was an indicator of deprivation.

Noting that Brent child poverty was at 41%, compared to the London average of 35%, which was partly attributed to low income, the Committee asked whether the recommendations from Lord Best's poverty commission had been fully implemented. Tom Pickup responded that the commission recommendations had all been fully delivered, with a delivery plan published alongside Lord Best's report in 2021. The report presented to the Committee now presented the activity that had taken place since the poverty commission whilst acknowledging that a lot had changed across the past 5 years. In response to whether the Council was satisfied that the actions taken were adequate, he advised that the Council had done its best to deliver within its gift, and felt that the report demonstrated that the Council took poverty alleviation seriously and focused on this across the board in delivering all of its services.

As no further issues were raised the Chair thanked officers for their time and responses and invited members to make recommendations, with the following RESOLVED:

- i) To recommend that children and young people were consulted in relation to poverty alleviation work the Council was undertaking.
- ii) To recommend engagement with children and young people in Temporary Accommodation to understand the unique challenges they experienced.
- iii) To advocate for increased work experience, skills and training opportunities for children and young people in Brent, including through partnerships with the NHS, Mayor's Academy and Wembley Stadium.

- iv) To advocate for a TA allocations approach prioritising local places for young people undertaking examinations.

A number of information requests were also made during the course of the discussion, recorded as follows:

- i) For the Committee and Brent Youth Parliament to receive data in relation to how many young people had secured jobs following attendance at jobs fairs.
- ii) For the Committee to receive an update from the Public Health Team on the development of a Food Strategy.
- iii) For the Committee to receive an update from the Regeneration Team on how it would reach it's target of delivering 5,000 Council homes.

9. Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2025-26

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

10. Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Recommendations Tracker 2025-26

The Committee noted the recommendations tracker.

11. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 8:20pm

COUNCILLOR KETAN SHETH
Chair