



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

**Minutes of the ORDINARY (BUDGET SETTING) MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 23 February 2026
at 3.30 pm**

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor Ryan Hack

The Deputy Mayor
Councillor Narinder Singh Bajwa

COUNCILLORS:

Afzal	Agha
Ahmadi Moghaddam	Ahmed
Akram	Benea
M Butt	S Butt
Chohan	Choudry
Clinton	Conneely
Crabb	Dar
Dixon	Donnelly-Jackson
Ethapemi	Farah
Fraser	Gbajumo
Grahl	Hylton
Johnson	Kabir
Kansagra	Kelcher
Kennelly	Knight
Long	Lorber
Mahmood	Matin
Maurice	Miller
Mistry	Mitchell
Moeen	Molloy
Nerva	J.Patel
M.Patel	Rajan-Seelan
Rubin	Shah
Ketan Sheth	Krupa Sheth
L.Smith	

1. Mayor's Introductory Statement

The Mayor welcomed all those present to the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance. Members were thanked for their cooperation with the change in start time for the meeting, with the Mayor reminding everyone of his intention to briefly pause proceedings for a 15 minute period at 5:30pm to enable those

members observing Ramadan to participate in Iftar before resuming to complete the remainder of the agenda.

2. **Mayors Statement - Order of Business**

Before consideration of the formal agenda, the Mayor informed members of a change to the order of business. Given the attendance of Paul Dossett (Grant Thornton) as the Council's External Audit Partner for the External Audit Annual Report, he advised of the intention to move that report (listed as Item 7 on the agenda) for consideration in advance of the main Budget and Council Tax debate.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

- (1) The business to be considered at the meeting be re-arranged in the following order:
 - Agenda Item 6 – Auditors Annual Report on the London Borough of Brent
 - Agenda Item 7 – Budget & Council 2006-27
- (2) The remaining items of business to then follow in the same order as listed on the agenda.

Please note the minutes reflect the order of business taken at the meeting.

3. **Procedural Motion - Conduct of Business**

The Mayor advised that as this meeting had been designated as the Council's formal budget and Council Tax setting meeting, he would be inviting Councillor Dixon (as the Majority Group Chief Whip) to move a procedural motion, in accordance with Standing Orders, relating to the conduct of the debate on the budget report. Councillor Dixon then proceeded to move the procedural motion.

Prior to being put to the vote, Councillor Lorber (as Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group) spoke to highlight his objection to the proposed timing for the length of his speech in response to the Leader having moved the budget proposals, during the budget debate. As a result of the concerns expressed, he therefore moved an amendment to the proposed timings outlined within the procedural motion designed to provide the Leaders of all Opposition Groups with up to 10 minutes each to speak when responding to the budget and moving their alternative proposals.

Given there was no provision for debate on procedural motions, the Mayor advised that he would put the amendment followed by the substantive motion straight to the vote without further discussion.

On this basis, the amendment moved by Councillor Lorder to the procedural motion on the arrangements for the budget debate was put to the vote and declared **LOST**.

The Mayor then moved on to put the substantive (unamended) procedural motion to the vote which was declared **CARRIED**. It was therefore **RESOLVED** (with all

Liberal Democrats & Green members voting against and Conservative members abstaining) that the following procedural motion be agreed:

- (1) That the Leader of the Council be permitted to speak for up to 20 minutes in presenting the report to the meeting and setting out the Cabinet's proposals for the budget, after which, the following arrangements be agreed for the purpose of debating and voting upon the Budget and Council Tax:
 - (a) The Leader of the Conservative Group as the Principal Opposition Group (or their nominated representative) be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes in response to the Leader and in order to move their alternative budget proposals.
 - (b) The Leader of the Green Group (or their nominated representative) be permitted to speak in response to the Leader and in order to move their alternative budget proposals for up to 5 minutes.
 - (c) The Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group (or their nominated representative) be permitted to speak in response to the Leader and in order to move their alternative budget proposals for up to 5 minutes.
 - (d) The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources be permitted to speak on the budget proposals for up to 10 minutes.
 - (e) The Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group be permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes in order to present the Task Group findings and key recommendations;
 - (f) A general debate follow during which the usual rules for debate will apply as set out in Standing Orders (save as set out in this procedural motion);
- (2) At the end of the general debate, the Leader of the Council be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes to submit his closing remarks.
- (3) Following the close of the debate, recorded votes on any amendments to the budget proposals and then the final substantive budget proposals be taken in turn with the recommendations each taken as one block for voting purposes.

4. **Apologies for Absence**

The Mayor reported that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Aden, Begum, Chan, Chappell, Collymore, Hirani, T.Smith and Tatler.

An apology for lateness was also received from Councillor Shah.

5. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous Council meetings held on the following dates be approved as a correct record:

- (a) Monday 10 November 2025

(b) Tuesday 13 January 2026 (Extraordinary Council Meeting)

6. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

7. **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor made the following announcements:

(i) Kings New Years Honours List

The Mayor opened his announcements by congratulating all those associated with Brent who had received an honour in the Kings New Year Honours list for 2026.

(ii) Holocaust & Genocide Memorial Day

He then moved on to refer to the Holocaust & Genocide Memorial Day event, which had been held during January focussed around the theme of "Bridging Generations".

Reflecting on the theme of the event, the Mayor highlighted the importance in recognising remembrance not only as an historical consideration but also as a responsibility belonging to everyone in the present to ensure that the lessons learnt from the past and voice of survivors could be passed between generations and never forgotten.

(iii) Passing of ex-Councillor Chandubhai Patel

The Mayor advised that it was with regret he had to announce the sad passing of former Councillor Chandubhai Patel. Members were advised that former Councillor Patel had served as a member of the Council from 2002 to 2014 representing Sudbury ward and had been survived by his wife Manjula and three adult children.

On behalf of Brent Council, the Mayor offered his sincerest sympathy and heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of former Councillor Patel.

(iv) Kingsbury High School

As a final announcement, the Mayor took the opportunity on behalf of the Council to offer his thoughts, hope and well wishes to everyone within the Kingsbury High School community along with those families directly affected, following the recent and distressing incident at the school.

(v) Petitions

Prior to ending his announcements, the Mayor referred members to the list of current petitions tabled at the meeting, in accordance with Standing Orders which also detailed the action being taken to deal with them.

8. **Appointments to Committees and Other Bodies (if any)**

The Mayor advised that there were no appointments to Council Committees, Sub Committees and other bodies which had been received for consideration.

9. External Auditor's Annual Report on the London Borough of Brent

In accordance with the change in the order of business agreed at the start of the meeting, the Mayor then invited Paul Dossett (Grant Thornton) as the Council's External Auditor Partner to introduce the External Audit 2024-25 Annual Report on Value for Money (VFM).

In introducing the report, Paul Dossett summarised the approach towards the VFM audit and drew Members attention to the focus of the Annual Report on the Council's arrangements in relation to three areas, Governance, Financial Sustainability and Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness along with the key findings detailed within the Annual Report. Members were advised that work to finalise sign-off of the Council's 2024-25 Financial Statement of Accounts was now in the process of being completed, with the Executive Summary providing an overview in relation to the Value for Money assessment of the Council's arrangements.

As part of the auditor's work, members were advised that whilst no significant areas of risk or weakness had been identified in the Council's arrangements for Governance, a significant area of risk and weakness had been raised in respect of the Council's arrangements to secure Financial Sustainability. This related to the ability to set a budget for 2025-26 that could be delivered without any further draw on reserves to fund in-year overspends, based on challenges identified in relation to delivery of the Medium Term Financial Plan and identification of a pipeline of recurrent savings and income generation schemes. In addition, a further area of weakness had been identified in relation to the arrangements for Improving Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness reflecting the need identified to ensure improvements in compliance in the housing service following the outcome of the Council's self-referral to the Regulator of Social Housing in May 2025.

In recognising the significant financial pressures and challenges faced across local government, Paul Dossett advised that the report included a detailed commentary on the review of arrangements in relation to the Council's Governance, maintaining the Council's financial sustainability and Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness with the recent Local Government Association Peer Challenge having identified a strong track record in delivering services and managing performance. It was also noted that the auditors had found that the Council's arrangements for managing risk to be adequate with further improvements identified in arrangements relating to the performance management framework.

Whilst a number of improvement recommendations had also been identified, all recommendations had been acknowledged and accepted with action plans put in place to address the matters raised and management responses provided that would be subject to ongoing monitoring. Members were also reminded of the new timescales to be introduced during 2026-27 for completion of the Statement of Accounts and Audit requirements, which it was noted would require continued focus in terms of production of the financial statements moving forward. In commending the report to Council thanks were expressed to all officers involved in supporting the audit process.

The Mayor then invited Councillor Mili Patel, as Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources, to respond to the Annual report on behalf of the Council. In welcoming the report, she felt it important to recognise and value the independent nature of the audit opinion and findings identified. Whilst acknowledging the challenges identified in order to ensure Brent remained on a stable financial footing it was felt the report reflected the reality faced by many local authorities such as Brent given what was felt to have been the damage caused by the systematic underfunding of local government by previous governments, with the current government's cash injection and commitment to meaningful reform therefore welcomed.

Recognising the fact that Brent had not found itself needing to seek Exceptional Financial Support, unlike many of its peers, the work being undertaken with officers to address the recommendations with the Annual Report were highlighted with management responses being provided on all issues, as detailed within the report. This included action to bolster the number of ear-marked reserves within the budget being presented to Council for approval (in contrast to the approach being taken by the opposition parties) with Councillor Mili Patel assuring members of the commitment towards ensuring the Council continued to deliver its financial responsibilities and was able to operate in a prudent way designed to secure maximum value for money. In concluding her response, the opportunity was also taken to thank Paul Dossett and his team along with the Council's finance officers and Audit & Standards Advisory Committee for the diligent work undertaken on the audit.

The Mayor then invited contributions from other members, with the following comments received.

In response to the outline of the audit process provided, Councillor Lorber sought further detail as to whether this had included any review of the costs incurred in relation to the arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness as a result of the ongoing delay in progressing delivery of the Altamira Morland Gardens housing scheme along with the arrangements for addressing the delays in the turnaround of void housing properties (given the impact in managing housing demand) and need identified to ensure improvements in compliance in the housing service. In responding on the issues raised, Paul Dossett advised that the scope of the audit had been focussed on the Council's overall arrangements for delivering Value for Money as prescribed within the National Audit Office Code of Audit Practice rather than on the delivery of specific schemes or projects. Given the issues highlighted on the Morland Gardens Scheme when the previous Annual Report had been presented, the matter had been reviewed but no further specific audit activity had been identified under the VFM annual audit process.

In welcoming the focus within the report on delivery of the improvements identified as required, following the Council's self-referral to the Regulator of Social Housing, within the Compliance Recovery and Performance Improvement Plan, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet member for Housing) spoke next to outline some of the key areas of work being delivered. These included the completion of an audit and data review across all key compliance workstreams by a specialist independent advisor. The findings from the audit had fed into the development of a robust action plan for improvement which included a root cause analysis (as recommended by

The Regulator) to ensure permanent solutions were implemented on which progress would be monitored by the newly established Housing and Tenant Improvement Programme Board. Following on from the audit, work was also underway to systematically review each compliance stream and complete data corrective work, which it was noted would not only include Council owned properties but also those managed by i4B and FWH in order to ensure a consistent, council-wide approach designed to strengthen both safety and assurance moving forward. In addition, the opportunity was also taken to highlight the ongoing work being undertaken in seeking to drive forward further improvements at pace designed to strengthen oversight and provide re-assurance for tenants. This included the onboarding of additional contractors to expedite the completion of works as a consequence of Fire Risk Assessments alongside the rebuild of the True Compliance and the NEC asset register and work relating to safety certification supported by an acceleration of the Stock Condition Survey programme. In terms of oversight and resource to support the process, members were advised of the expansion of the Compliance Team as well as the establishment of the Housing & Tenant Satisfaction Improvement Board (chaired by the Chief Executive) with overall responsibility for providing governance and oversight by monitoring the progress of improvement initiatives and ensuring compliance with housing standards. In response, Paul Dossett felt it important to recognise the progress made in response to the outcome of the self-referral process, with members also noting the process of ongoing engagement with the Regulator, which had resulted in a positive working relationship having been developed and the Regulator reported as being supportive and having welcomed the pace at which the Housing Management Service was working to enhance stock data and recover their position through the improvement programme.

As a final contribution, Councillor Kansagra sought further assurance on the basis of the assessment relating to the significant weakness which had been identified in relation to the Council's Financial Sustainability. In response, Paul Dossett advised that this had reflected, in line with many other local authorities, the significant challenges and cost pressures being driven by the unprecedented increase in demand for services with the auditors continuing to focus on the measures being taken by Brent in seeking to balance its budget and ensure it maintained a sustainable budget position moving forward.

As no other members indicated they wished to speak the Mayor once again thanked Paul Dossett for his attendance and then put the recommendations in the report to the vote which were declared **CARRIED**.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** to note the External Auditor's Annual Report on Value for Money as part of the 2024-25 audit of the year end accounts.

10. **Budget and Council Tax 2026 - 2027**

The Mayor then moved on to receive the report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources setting out the Council's budget proposals for 2026-27. Included within the report were the results of the budget consultation, scrutiny and equalities processes along with a summary of the overall financial position, risks, issues and uncertainties facing the Council over the medium term.

In accordance with the procedural motion agreed at the start of the meeting, the Mayor invited Councillor Muhammed Butt, as Leader of the Council, to introduce and move the budget proposals within the report.

In taking a moment to reflect on the comments made by the Mayor during his announcements on the recent distressing incident at Kingsbury High School, Councillor Muhammed Butt opened his introduction of the report by taking the opportunity to express his thanks to the emergency services, staff and students for the courage and professionalism displayed in their response to the incident given the challenging circumstances and wished all those affected, including the young people still recuperating, a speedy recovery.

Before moving on to focus on the detail of the budget, Councillor Muhammed Butt also placed on record his thanks to officers, councillors the public and other stakeholders for their contribution in preparation of the budget, highlighting the significant amount of work undertaken to ensure that the budget had been subject to proper challenge and scrutiny, and that the Council was in a position to present a lawful and balanced budget. In recognising the difficult nature of choices reflecting current reality as opposed to political rhetoric, he felt it important to recognise the way in which the current Administration had once again be able to present a budget which had not only been designed to deliver a fair and responsible long term approach but would also continue to make a difference for residents across the borough and had avoided the need to seek Exceptional Financial Support.

Given that the meeting was the final Full Council before the local elections, Councillor Muhammed Butt also reflected on the role of elected members and the privilege of public service, thanking those councillors who were not standing in the upcoming election for the time and service they had dedicated in seeking to represent their constituents in delivery of a better Brent, regardless of their political persuasion.

Moving on to the budget proposals, Councillor Muhammed Butt reminded members that budgets were about choices, but that not all choices were optional, outlining the increasing pressures faced by the Council in relation to an increasingly ageing population, rising demand in adult social care and children's services alongside inflationary pressures impacting on placement and contract as well as a range of other costs. The scale of these issues had been highlighted in the budget report with growth pressures identified totalling £54.2m, driven by inflation, demographic change and service demand, which were felt to demonstrate the price of the reality faced by the Council in seeking to set a balanced budget. In highlighting the resulting need for the budget proposals and ambitions to be focused and funded on the basis of this reality, he also felt it important to remind members of the additional financial context in terms of the impact arising from the previous Governments mismanagement of the economy and programme of austerity which had required the Council to deliver £238m of cuts during that period leading to a managed decline in public services, which the current government was now seeking to address. As such he felt residents deserved more than political theatre, with the budget presented for consideration based on a reasoned plan focussed on reality and experience rather than a wish list of promises, recognising that Councils of different political control across the country would be having to take the same approach.

Referring next to the national funding context, Councillor Muhammed Butt welcomed the difference he felt the current Labour government was beginning to make in terms of their approach to the funding of local government with the funding settlement now designed to recognise need. As a result he welcomed the outcome of the Fair Funding Review and resulting increase in Brent's core funding by £70.4m, providing net additional funding of £25.4m. Whilst welcoming this additional funding alongside the SEND reforms also recently announced by the government it was felt important to highlight that the uplift would not enable every challenge or pressure to be solved, erase the impact of austerity or remove the need for further devolution and reform of local government finance.

Moving on to focus in detail on the budget proposals set out within the report, Councillor Muhammed Butt began by outlining the way in which the budget had been designed to protect frontline services whilst also enabling investment in key priorities identified by residents focussed around a cleaner, safer and more affordable Brent. In noting the total budget requirement for the year as £501.8m, funded through a mix of core grants, business rates, council tax and specific grants, members were also reminded of the scale and wide range of services the Council was responsible for delivering including social care, SEND, homelessness prevention, safeguarding, waste collection, community safety, libraries, leisure, parks, streets and local infrastructure, many of which it was noted had not been referred to within the alternative budget proposals submitted by the Opposition Groups. Given the commitment in seeking to protect frontline services in a way that matched realism with real delivery and change members were advised that the Administration had felt there was little scope to propose anything other than a 4.99% increase in Council Tax, which it was noted was within the maximum permitted and would include the adult social care precept. In presenting the proposals to members, Councillor Muhammed Butt advised this would generate £12.2m in recurring income (with additional income from the taxbase) and whilst confirming that the decision had not been taken lightly felt it important to highlight the limited options available given Council Tax represented one of the few income levers directly controlled by local authorities, with the alternative being to pretend you could protect services while reducing the resources available to fund them.

Recognising the ongoing pressure on household budgets, however, Councillor Muhammed Butt also felt it important to outline the financial support also being provided to residents designed to assist those more vulnerable and in need, which included ongoing provision in relation to Council Tax Support and the Residents Support Fund alongside future support through the Government's new Crisis and Resilience Funding and with any resident experiencing financial difficulty encouraged to seek support.

Councillor Muhammed Butt then drew members' attention to the proposals included within the report relating to the capital programme based on an investment programme totalling £813.3m over the next five years, including almost £300m identified during 2026 to 2027. Key areas of investment identified as making a real difference to residents included:

- £45.6m allocated for Bridge Park Regeneration, including a new leisure centre and wider improvements;
- £23.1m for Wembley Housing Zone, supporting the delivery of 291 new homes, nearly half of which would be affordable;

- over £81.3m identified for South Kilburn Regeneration and public realm improvements, including a new school, improved public spaces and a district heat network for more than 2,600 homes;
- a £11.2m investment for the College of North West London regeneration, helping unlock a £150m redevelopment with new education facilities and nearly 2,000 new homes;
- investment in cleaner, safer neighbourhoods, including £3m for public realm and street cleansing, £2.6m for CCTV and public safety and more than £4.3m a year for highways and transport infrastructure;
- investment in a greener Brent, focussed around £1.5m in green corridors, £5m for carbon reduction schemes and £2.9m on energy efficient heating;
- investment in children and young people, including over £4m for SEND and schools (designed to create over 200 new SEND places and a new Post 16 Skills Centre) alongside a £4m allocation for youth facilities; and
- £600,000 to support West London Orbital as a means of unlocking jobs, growth and cleaner more accessible transport links.

On this basis, and in seeking to summarise the approach towards the budget outlined within the report, Councillor Muhammed Butt felt that proposals should be recognised as prudent, responsible, grounded and honest about the pressures facing the Council, whilst also seeking to protect vital services and invest in the future of the borough. In contrast, he then moved on to compare this with the approach taken by the Opposition Groups in relation to their alternative budget proposals and potential consequences.

Referring firstly to the alternative proposals submitted by the Conservative Group, he advised that whilst the advice indicated they could be balanced for the year, they still carried significant risk beyond that period. As a starting point, he advised members that the proposed increase in Council Tax of only 3.99% rather than 4.99% would immediately create a £1.8m budget gap in 2026 to 2027 with the compounding effect in also permanently reducing the Council's baseline funding, widening this gap over time. Concerns were also highlighted in relation to the proposed introduction of one hour free parking on high streets, which was identified as creating an additional £1.4m loss of income whilst also impacting on the ongoing investment in the Freedom Pass, as well as the proposed removal of landlord incentives. Whilst this had been presented as generating £1.2m of savings it was pointed out this would directly impact on the ability to secure tenancies designed to prevent homelessness and reduce the reliance on temporary accommodation with the potential to therefore increase costs. Reference was also made to the inclusion of a Revenue Integrity Plan within the proposals, which it was pointed out included a range of figures that did not appear to have been fully verified or included within the budget proposals.

Moving on to the Liberal Democrats Group alternative budget proposals, Councillor Muhammed Butt again highlighted the financial advice that whilst the proposals could be balanced for one year they carried risk and did not consider the implications beyond that year. In noting the scale of new spending commitments proposed (totalling £37.4m) concern was expressed that these relied heavily on the use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) reserves and other one off or constrained funding sources limiting the ability to support future infrastructure investment and failing to recognise the investment already provided in areas such as enforcement activity and tree planting. Concerns were also highlighted in

relation to the cuts proposed in communications activity and the Brent Magazine, which he felt was a form of communication valued by many residents. In terms of communication, the opportunity was also taken to remind members of recent positive external recognition of Brent, including Wembley Park being named one of The Sunday Times' best places to live in London, analysis showing more people choosing to move to Brent, and Brent being named the cleverest borough in terms of academic measures and achievement, all of which he felt reflected the ambition, confidence and impact of investment across the borough.

Focussing on the alternative budget proposals submitted by the Greens, Councillor Muhammed Butt expressed concern about the late timing of the submission and the absence of consideration of future year implications. In highlighting the proposed reliance on additional income to fund their pledges generated from increased parking fees, expanded Controlled Parking Zones and CIL, reference was made to the supporting finance advice which had been provided confirming that whilst increasing parking fees and expanding CPZs were legally permissible they could only be implemented for traffic management purposes, rather than to generate surplus revenue for unrelated general budget purposes.

In summing up, Councillor Muhammed Butt therefore felt that all three of the alternative budgets therefore shared the same weakness, namely promises in year one, risk pushed into future years, and funding plans that depended on one off or constrained funding sources, which would have the effect of creating pressures elsewhere. It was also felt important to note that none of the proposals had been presented to the Budget Scrutiny Task Group for review in advance of their submission. In thanking the Budget Scrutiny Task Group for their input into the budget setting process and recommendations made as a result, he expressed disappointment at what he felt to be the lack of responsible and reasonable alternative proposals submitted, which it was felt would place the future financial resilience of the Council at risk.

Returning to the proposals set out in the report, and in summing up he reminded members of the approach adopted by the Administration in seeking to confront the £54.2m in cost pressures arising from demography and inflation whilst protecting essential services and investing responsibly in cleaner streets, safer neighbourhoods and a more affordable Brent all of which had been paired alongside a robust capital programme designed to provide future and sustained growth rather than short term fixes and match the realism of the financial challenges and pressures faced by the Council with a desire to do more in responding to the needs and aspirations of local residents across Brent. On this basis he urged members to oppose the Opposition Groups alternative budget proposals and commended the budget, as set out in the report, to all members for approval.

The Mayor thanked the Leader for opening the debate and then invited Councillor Kansagra, as Leader of the Conservative Group, to respond to the budget proposals.

Prior to responding and moving the Conservative Group alternative budget proposals Councillor Kansagra advised that he had nominated Councillor Jayanti Patel to speak on behalf of the Group.

In presenting the alternative proposals, Councillor Jayanti Patel began by stating that the debate, in his Groups view, concerned more than figures contained within a budget spreadsheet with the focus more on trust, confidence and whether residents could be assured that public funds were being managed effectively and responsibly. In confirming that the Conservative Group would not supporting the budget proposals moved by the Leader, he advised members this was not based on opposition to investment or ambition but reflected the view that the proposals failed in relation to the need for financial sustainability, transparency and long-term resilience. In support of this view, reference was made to the high level of Council Tax arrears in Brent, decline in reserves and management of the projected in year overspend identified totalling £12.5m impacting on the balance of unallocated reserves with reference also made to CIPFA guidance requiring local authorities to maintain financial resilience and avoid structural deficits. As a result, concern was expressed that the approach adopted by the Labour Administration appeared to rely on optimistic assumptions, one off measures and short-term solutions, which the Conservative Group considered unsustainable.

Concerns were also expressed at the cumulative impact relating to the increases in Council Tax on residents over the previous 10 years given the cost of living pressures being experienced by so many local households, with the proposed 1% reduction to 3.99% recommended by the Conservative Group felt to represent a fairer and more sustainable and responsible approach. Moving on to focus on the other key alternative budget proposals submitted by the Conservative Group he advised that whilst willing to support those proposals which it was felt would assist residents in paying less for services and receiving better value for money, the amendments moved had sought to ensure the Council took a more robust approach towards management of the budget recognising the need to maintain fiscal responsibility, efficiency, and the well-being of local communities. As a result, he pointed out the Conservatives alternative budget proposals had sought to identify a number of areas where it was felt savings or enhancements could be made without compromising the quality of services provided. Areas of focussed included:

- the Administration's proposal to deliver £10.38m in savings through digital transformation and efficiency measures. While supporting genuine efficiencies, he stated that the Conservative Group did not support approaches that resulted in the reduction of resources or income generation schemes that shifted costs onto residents and as an alternative highlighted the way in which that the Conservative Group's amendments sought to address the required level of savings and efficiencies required to deliver a balanced budget through improved income recovery, strengthened workforce structures and enhanced digital delivery whilst also maintaining protection for adult social care and children's services.
- On revenue integrity and debt, Councillor Jayanti Patel referred to internal audit findings that had identified significant weaknesses in Council Tax administration, including discounts being applied incorrectly and weak debt enforcement outcomes. He acknowledged the need to protect vulnerable residents but stated that vulnerability must be identified and managed properly with proposals outlined for a revenue integrity plan, including mandatory direct debits, full cost recovery on liability orders, proper vulnerability verification, strengthened enforcement procedures and a clear policy framework. He stated that the proposals were intended to ensure fairness, protect those

unable to pay and address systemic failures in relation to the treatment of those who chose not to pay.

- With regard to high streets and parking, Councillor Jayanti Patel advised that the Conservative Group proposal to provide 1 hour of free parking on high streets had been designed to provide targeted economic support for local businesses with the estimated £1.4m revenue impact having been offset within their overall proposals and seen as representing an investment in the local economy rather than a loss.
- In relation to housing and building safety, the serious health and safety compliance failings identified as a result of the Council's referral to the Regulator of Social Housing were highlighted, with a subsequent independent forensic audit having identified significant governance and data weaknesses. In recognising that residents were entitled to confidence in the safety of their homes he outlined the proposals within the Conservative Group's alternative budget for funding to support an independent building survey panel, along with the commitment to complete 100% stock condition surveys by March 2028 and the establishment of clear senior accountability.
- Turning to public realm, Councillor Jayanti Patel felt it important to recognise the concerns being raised by local residents regarding the state of the borough's highways, pavements and levels of fly tipping with the Conservative Group, as a result, proposing an increase in the level of funding to provide more proactive investment in maintenance and repairs. In addition, they were proposing an additional £1.65m to support enhanced enforcement of fly tipping and environmental crime including an increase in use of mobile CCTV supporting the provision of clean and safe streets as a core responsibility of the Council.
- As a final issue, attention was drawn to finance and governance arrangements with reference once again made to internal audit findings that had identified unauthorised payments, incomplete reporting and repeated delays in the production of statutory accounts. These issues were felt to undermine confidence in the Council's financial management with a need identified for strengthened controls, clear accountability and improved transparency.

In formally moving the Conservative Groups alternative budget proposals, Councillor Jayanti Patel ended by highlighting that the proposals had been assessed as producing a legally balanced budget which he felt would also provide a responsible approach in seeking to not only deliver savings and efficiencies but also deliver a more sustainable and strategic approach towards management of the budget over the longer term (including the management of reserves) whilst also helping to ease the financial burden currently being faced by the Council and experienced by many residents across the borough and providing a lower council tax increase, stronger financial controls, improved revenue integrity, targeted infrastructure investment and independent oversight of housing safety. In thanking the Corporate Director and Deputy Director of Finance for their assistance, he ended by commending the Conservative Groups alternative budget proposals to Council.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Jayanti Patel for his comments and for moving the alternative budget proposals on behalf of the Conservative Group. He then invited Councillor Mitchell, as Leader of the Green Group, to move the alternative budget proposals submitted on behalf of the Green Group.

In presenting the Green Groups alternative budget proposals, Councillor Mitchell (in her inaugural speech as Leader of the Green Group) began by taking the opportunity to highlight her appointment as the first female leader of a political group in Brent for over 15 years and to reflect on how this aligned with the culture across Brent in seeking to ensure females were adequately represented within the Council Chamber in order to maintain trust and confidence in local democracy.

Referring to the need to recognise the links between the budget proposals moved by the Leader on behalf of the Labour Administration and stance taken by the Labour Government nationally in relation to the funding of public services, Councillor Mitchell felt it important to highlight that despite repeated references to the impact of austerity under the previous Conservative Government, the Council even under a Labour Government had still been required to propose a package of proposed cuts totalling £10.4m for local services alongside a Council Tax increase of almost 5% during a cost-of-living crisis. Despite the enhanced funding settlement provided, the Green Group felt that this had still failed to tackle the levels of inequality identified or the structural financial pressures facing local government with the promise of change identified by the Leader in moving the budget proposals failing, in her view, to have materialised. Despite the utilisation of CIL contributions and promise of support to more vulnerable residents and those in financial hardship, Councillor Mitchell felt that the budget proposals moved on behalf of the Administration would still have a detrimental and negative impact on residents which could not be mitigated through presentation or reassurance. As a result, the Green Party continued to call for a radical overhaul of the funding of local government with the present system, including council tax, felt to be regressive and unsustainable.

Whilst acknowledging that the alternative budget proposals being moved on behalf of the Green Group did not represent a fully comprehensive view of investment opportunities, cost saving measures or income generation opportunities there presentation was, it was pointed out, intended to set a series of core principles for financial prioritisation and a direction of travel based on Green Party values of social and environmental justice rather than the continuation of austerity. Whilst nationally this would be focussed on the introduction of a fairer and greener wealth based tax system, locally the priorities for investment would be focussed across the following areas:

- Aligning with the energy transition away from fossil fuels and ensuring long-term energy resilience, including investment in energy retrofitting and community owned renewable energy to reduce carbon emissions, lower energy bills and retain energy wealth within Brent.
- Ensuring housing equity for all Brent's residents including enhanced scrutiny of housing policies and operations and landlord licensing arrangements, including strengthening housing enforcement action against rogue landlords, addressing unlicensed Houses in Multiple Occupation, and establishing a

dedicated Housing Scrutiny Committee to improve standards and accountability.

- Protecting and investing in Brent's Green Spaces, including parks, protected areas of natural interest and pocket parks and other green spaces, including reintroducing free bulky waste collections to reduce fly tipping, investing in trees and biodiversity to protect green spaces for all Brent residents.

In addition, Councillor Mitchell advised that the Green Group were keen to explore what they felt to be a number of under-utilised avenues for income generation and more proactive approach towards maximising the council's assets, some, but not all of which had been costed as part of the alternative budget proposals being moved. These included expanding CPZs and increasing parking revenue through a mix of increasing the base rate and introducing a variable parking rate designed to take account of vehicle size, weight and emissions type; further investment in debt collection initiatives, and ensuring maximum return on investment generated through Brent-owned properties, recognising their social as well as financial value. Where the need for further exploration was identified members were advised funding had been included for further feasibility studies. Members were advised that the budget proposals had also proposed a modest use of SCIL funding at £2.4m, designed to part-fund travel initiatives to enhance active travel and traffic calming measures with it noted that the Budget Scrutiny Task Group, had also identified the opportunity to deploy CIL funding more widely to support infrastructure and to offset financial pressures on services, while ensuring the residents that benefited where those most impacted by development across the borough. In urging the Administration to show leadership on priorities such as the energy transition through genuine partnership working and meaningful community engagement, Councillor Mitchell was keen to avoid what she felt remained a reliance on costly and low impact initiatives which she described as more tokenistic in nature and not able to deliver the type of change required.

Commenting on the current status of the Labour Party nationally, Councillor Mitchell also highlighted what she felt to be the shift away from its core principles in representing the interests of ordinary working people reflected in the level of funding it now received from wealthy donors when compared to Trade Unions and in concluding felt this placed the Greens as the main political party able to truly represent the interests of residents demonstrated by growing support across London. On this basis she advised that the Green Group would therefore not be supporting the budget proposals moved by the Leader, intimating that austerity implemented under a Labour administration was no different in its impact on residents than austerity implemented under a Conservative administration and on this basis moved and commended the Green Groups alternative budget proposals to Council.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Mitchell for her comments and for moving the alternative budget proposals on behalf of the Green Group. He then invited Councillor Lorber, as Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group, to move the alternative budget proposals submitted on behalf of the Liberal Democrats Group.

In presenting the Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals, Councillor Lorber began by highlighting what he felt was a need to focus on the management of financial risk. Reminding members of the budget approved by the Labour

Administration two years earlier which had been subsequently overspent by almost £14m within 6 months, he felt lessons had not been learnt given the recurring level of in-year overspends experienced since, including the £12.5m identified during 2025-26. It was therefore the Liberal Democrats Group's view that the Labour Administration needed to demonstrate its ability to deliver a genuinely balanced budget before criticising the alternative proposals of other political groups.

Whilst recognising the challenging nature of the financial situation faced by the Council, it was felt this had been compounded by the lack of progress on reform of the local government finance system and the programme of austerity, which in his view could be traced back to 2008 under the then Labour Government and their efforts to bail out the financial sector with the consequences of those decisions having been experienced on a continuing cycle ever since and the current Labour Government having failed to deliver the level of change promised. He felt this included a failure to address the problem of rising Adult Social Care and Homelessness Costs which had also significantly contributed to the ongoing financial pressures being faced by Council's.

Despite repeated concerns being raised about the cost of living crisis, Councillor Lorber felt it important to recognise the way in which the Government was expecting local authorities such as Brent to increase Council Tax by 5% on a recurring basis which, coupled with the imposition of a reduction in the Council Tax Support Scheme, had led to a significant increase in the burden placed on Brent residents and those most in need.

Highlighting concerns regarding the ability of the Labour Administration to maintain and repair the highway, keep the borough clean and effectively tackle anti-social behaviour he felt much of what residents experienced living in Brent was characterised by neglect, disrepair and poor environmental conditions with the approach adopted in relation to the delayed use of Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) also criticised given the repeated calls from the Liberal Democrats in advocating for the use of this funding to support investment in Brent's roads, pavements, parks and open spaces. The delay in seeking to utilise this funding in advance of the election he felt had only made the levels of neglect worse and increased costs which could have been avoided had essential maintenance been carried out at the right time. In reminding members that the accumulated balance of SCIL funding generated had been approx. £177m he advised the Liberal Democrats were keen to ensure that residents' priorities remained at the forefront of the budget proposals being considered, with the Liberal Democrats Group having therefore proposed a number of amendments seeking to address areas of concern including the current state of cleanliness across the borough. He then moved on to outline the key budget proposals recommended by the Liberal Democrats Group which included £30m of proposed investment from current SCIL for a major programme of road & pavement resurfacing in the areas with the largest amount of new developments as these roads have been impacted by the both the works themselves and the increase in traffic / parking, alongside additional investment in the reactive repairs team enabling them to repair more reported defects and be more proactive in undertaking repairs. In support of this approach, he cited concerns regarding the recent upgrade of pavements along Wembley High Road, which he pointed out remained unsuitable for those with mobility issues.

As a further priority, reference was made to investment designed to support a more proactive approach towards keeping Brent clean, including increased investment in the street cleaning budget, enforcement and recycling programme. Other areas highlighted for investment included parks and open spaces the need to tackle antisocial behaviour as well as deliver on Climate Emergency commitments and restore what was felt to be a need for trust in Local Democracy.

Given the proposed increase in Council Tax, Councillor Lorber felt there was a need for the Council to ensure that as residents were being asked to pay more for services funding was refocussed and prioritised on local areas of concern. In highlighting the additional detail provided within the proposals included as part of the agenda papers, Councillor Lorber ended by outlining the important role members had in representing residents and local communities, which he felt the budget amendments presented by the Liberal Democrats had been designed to reflect in a balanced and pragmatic way that would enhance the offer from the Council recognising priorities being identified locally. As such he hoped all members would be able to support the amendments outlined and commended the Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals to Council.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Lorber for his comments and moving the alternative budget proposals on behalf of the Liberal Democrats Group and then moved on to invite Councillor Mili Patel, as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources to speak as the next stage in the budget debate.

Councillor Mili Patel began by highlighting the way in which she felt the budget proposals moved by the Leader had been shaped by and reflected the core values of fairness, equality and financial prudence, with the Council looking to enter the new financial year in a position of greater stability than had been experienced for some time.

In highlighting what she felt had been the previous coalition and Conservative Governments record of economic failure and way in which they had systematically undermined fairness in local government funding, this was contrasted with the approach adopted by the current Labour Government's more responsible long-term approach. This view reflected the announcement of the new local government funding settlement, which Councillor Mili Patel pointed out had been designed to place need at the heart of the system and was therefore regarded as a watershed moment for Council's such as Brent.

In expanding further on the previous Conservative Government's approach towards the funding of local government, it was felt this had demonstrated the more reactive and short term politics of that Government with decisions driven by political expediency rather than social need and which it was felt had resulted in many of the challenges now having to be addressed in relation to the economy and levels of inequality entrenched across communities in more deprived areas. In terms of the specific impact on Brent, it was pointed out this approach had resulted in the loss of millions of pounds of core funding which had led to significant cuts having to be delivered to vital services. This was also felt to have been compounded by Council's only being provided with single-year financial settlements, leaving them unable to plan for the long term and exacerbating the instability caused by austerity. Reflecting on the lessons learnt, Councillor Mili Patel felt this had identified a need to firstly recognise that short term decision making did not work and secondly that

there was a need to ensure decisions made were taken in the interests of all rather than any particular political party. Unfortunately, it was felt these lessons had also not been reflected in the alternative budget proposals submitted by the Conservative Group given what was felt to be their short term focus and lack of plans to grow finances in the long term or make investment past the 2026-27 financial year.

In contrast, however, Councillor Mili Patel felt it was clear that the new Labour Government had recognised the impact that their policies would have across local communities, with a clear plan to deliver fairer longer term growth based on the reintroduction of a multi-year funding settlement up to 2029, providing local authorities with the certainty needed to be able to plan ahead. Crucially, it was pointed out, the funding formula on which the settlement was based now also included deprivation as a measure alongside population size, enabling resources to be targeted on those areas most in need which, in recognising the pressures currently faced across Brent, had resulted in a welcomed net benefit of £22.9m in additional core funding for the Council. Highlighting ongoing pressures in demand on services, particularly in relation to costs associated with social care and the unprecedented increase in households continuing to present as homeless, the additional funding provided was identified as providing much needed support given the previous shortfall and gaps needing to be addressed as a priority.

Moving on to reflect on the difficult nature of the decisions that had needed to be made in setting a balanced budget, Councillor Mili Patel felt it important to recognise the way the choices made had been designed to deliver a deliberate and carefully balanced budget which sought to protect frontline services and support the most vulnerable in a way that would enable the borough to keep moving forward whilst also maintaining long term financial resilience. Acknowledging the approach outlined would require a 4.99% increase in Brent's element of the Council Tax (including the 2% Adult Social Care precept) an assurance was provided that the decision had not been taken lightly, recognising the cost of living pressures still being experienced by many households across the borough, and had been designed to avoid further cuts to essential services relied on by the most vulnerable as well as deliver investment in key public realm services highlighted as a priority by many residents. In order to mitigate against the impact, members were also reminded that the Council were acting to protect those most in need through the continued provision of the Council Tax Support Hardship Fund and also by strengthening the focus on prevention, recognising that the most sustainable way to manage rising demand was to prevent the need arising in the first place. As examples of this approach in action, members were advised of the investment in Adult Social Care towards early intervention, community based support and preventative services designed to help residents live independently for longer, avoiding far higher costs of late stage, complex care and in the expansion of homelessness prevention initiatives, reducing the need for more expensive emergency accommodation.

Turning to the Opposition Groups alternative budget proposals it was felt these were all missing vital components. Concerns were highlighted in relation to the lack of heart reflected in what were described as the Conservative Groups AI generated proposals, given the way it was felt they would lead to the poorest and most vulnerable in the borough appearing to pay the heaviest price. As an example reference was made to the proposals to end support for the London Living Wage

and cut back on Council Tax support which it was felt would create a more unfair borough and leave those vulnerable in a worse position. Moving on to the Liberal Democrats proposals, it was felt these represented a lack of courage in seeking to appease different groups of residents whilst avoiding the need to make difficult or controversial decisions and taking the path of least resistance in terms of their opposition to new development whilst then advocating for a different approach to the use of CIL funding. As a final comment, reference was made to the heart but lack of rational thinking within the Greens alternative budget proposals given what was felt to have been the lack of a practical plan to address levels of inequality and deliver the real change being sought. Highlighting that members of the Green Group had all originally been elected as members of the Labour Group, it was pointed out that the current Administrations commitment to residents across the borough had not changed and remained the same as the principles championed by those same members when representing the Labour Group.

Despite the significant challenges faced in being able to achieve a balanced budget, it was felt the approach adopted by the Labour Administration, in contrast to the Opposition Groups, highlighted the commitment towards delivering a budget of investment made possible as a result of the boroughs careful fiscal discipline and prudent financial management, which it was pointed out had enabled the delivery of:

- £3m in visible improvements to street cleansing and the public realm;
- £10.5m to modernise libraries, leisure centres, and family wellbeing centres;
- more than £4.3m annually for roads, pavements and street lighting;
- £23.1m to progress the Wembley Housing Zone and deliver 291 new homes;
- £45.6m to regenerate Bridge Park and provide a new leisure centre; alongside
- Significant investment in youth facilities, SEND places, parks, CCTV, energy efficiency, and regeneration across our town centres.

There were all recognised as priorities that would have a direct impact and benefit on residents across the borough only made possible as a result of the difficult decisions which had needed to be taken in relation to the setting the budget and avoiding the need to seek Exceptional Financial Support.

In concluding, Councillor Mili Patel took the opportunity to thank all residents who had contributed towards the budget consultation process along with the Finance Team and all other officers involved for their efforts and support in preparing the budget proposals. In commending the budget to Council, members were reminded of the detailed consultation and scrutiny which the budget proposals had been subject to, along with the prudent approach adopted by the Administration in order to protect and renew the provision of essential services, growth and investment for residents across the borough on a sustainable and long-term basis designed to ensure the interest of all communities was placed before the interests of the party they represented.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Mili Patel for her comments and as the final contribution prior to opening up the debate then invited Councillor Conneely, as Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group, to present the key themes within the Budget Scrutiny Task Group report, which had been included as an appendix to the Budget and Council Tax 2026-27 report.

Councillor Conneely in introducing the Budget Scrutiny Task Group report began by welcoming the return of multi-year Local Government funding settlements as a positive shift away from the more short term approach adopted by previous Government's and in providing Brent with greater certainty in terms of its strategic budget management, breaking down departmental silos and strengthening the ability to develop long-term planning. In terms of the approach taken by the Task Group, it was pointed out that members had, however, been clear the settlement taken on its own would not be able to compensate for more than a decade of austerity and underfunding of local government and other key public services given the ongoing pressures continuing to place significant strain on the Council's finances in relation to increasing demand for adult and children's social care, escalating pressures arising from the temporary accommodation crisis and the growing spread of privatisation and private equity within public services, particularly social care, which it was felt continued to undermine quality while driving up costs. Whilst continuing to support the need for ongoing reform of local government funding alongside the work being undertaken to address the approach towards commissioning and procurement of services the Task Group had been keen to ensure the focus on these areas was maintained in order to enable Councils to sustain services and deliver value for money for residents with incremental or piecemeal reform considered insufficient given the scale of accumulated financial pressure across the sector.

In presenting the Task Group report, Councillor Conneely highlighted the extensive nature of the review and recommendations which had been identified in relation to the budget proposals, as detailed within section 2 of their report. In supporting the move away from previous austerity style budgets and focus on a broader thematic approach towards financial planning, Councillor Conneely advised that the key objective of the Task Group had remained on the need to recognise the real impact of the budget proposals on residents and how this continued to be monitored moving forward, which it was pointed out would remain central to scrutiny's ongoing engagement with local stakeholders throughout the coming year.

In terms of the issues highlighted, support was expressed for the strong emphasis placed on strategic investment within the budget proposals with the Task Group particularly encouraged by the work being undertaken across Children and Young People to reduce the reliance on agency staff and move towards a model of direct employment, recognising the improved conditions of employment available for those staff, as well as the delivery of a Council owned Children's residential facility designed to reduce reliance on more expensive out of borough placements and also private sector provision and profiteering for children in care. The efforts being made, in relation to climate action, towards the delivery of a council-owned district heating network as a means of supporting the delivery of lower energy bills was also highlighted with the examples felt to demonstrate how strategic public investment could be used to improve outcomes for residents whilst also strengthening the Council's financial resilience. In recognition of the benefits identified, Councillor Conneely advised that the Task Group had been keen to

support the approach being embedded more widely across the Council based around a focus on key recommendations requiring clear and systematic monitoring of resident impact arising from budget decisions, with particular attention to vulnerable groups; the protection of council-owned land and assets for public use and for long-term sustainable income generation; the strengthening of social value, procurement, productivity and value-for-money frameworks across the Council and the implementation of digital transformation programmes in a way that would not exclude or disadvantage residents.

In thanking all members, officers and other stakeholders who had supported the review and wide variety of engagement undertaken, Councillor Conneely ended by commending the recommendations made by the Budget Scrutiny Task Group for consideration as part of the budget setting process recognising the role scrutiny was able to play in supporting transparent decision making and seeking to deliver the best outcomes for residents

The Mayor advised that this now concluded the opening statements and thanked Councillor Conneely for her comments. He then moved on to open up the debate on the budget proposals for comment by other members.

In opening the debate Councillor Grahl, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Employment, speaking in support of the budget proposals moved by the Leader began by expressing her disappointment at the lack of reference in any of the alternative budget proposals moved by the Opposition Groups specifically to children and young people. Concern was also raised in relation to the alternative budget proposals moved by the Conservative Group at the impact of the proposed removal of the Cabinet Member portfolio with statutory safeguarding responsibility for children. In contrast, Councillor Grahl highlighted that the budget proposals moved by the Leader represented, in her view, a genuine focus on children's services, incorporating an increase in core funding for children and young people, totalling £11.2m. This included investment to deliver 212 additional SEND placements alongside further improvements to youth facilities across the borough. In terms of the practical difference this would make for young people across Brent, she outlined how SEND children would receive the support they needed locally, in addition to the national investment for SEND recently announced by the Government, whilst continued funding would be provided for the Council's Family Wellbeing Centres. Reference was also made to the planned improvements to infrastructure for youth clubs, the provision of additional breakfast clubs, the continuation of Free School Meals for those eligible and the development of a stronger children's social care team, supported by reduced reliance on agency staff and the opening of the new Council-run children residential facility in Brent. Alongside the investment in children's services, Councillor Grahl also highlighted the investment in sport, skills and employment through the backing of a new further education campus in Wembley Park through the United Cities Group, supported by up to £11.2m of infrastructure funding from the Council, alongside investment in a new Post-16 Skills Centre for young people to assist them moving into employment and independence. On this basis, Councillor Grahl commended the budget proposals to Council as a clear demonstration of what a Labour budget looked like in terms of investing in young people and expanding opportunities for the next generation.

Other members who spoke on the budget proposals were as follows:

Speaking next, Councillor Kelcher began by reflecting on his experience of previous budget debates and their focus on how to divide a fixed and shrinking financial envelope. Whilst acknowledging the constraints of local government in not having control over interest rates, taxation or other macro-economic levers, he felt it important consider the ways in which the Council could seek to grow its financial base, rather than focusing solely on how to divide existing resources. In this respect, he highlighted the role of an outward-looking approach to development as a means of delivering new homes and generating significant developer contributions, with specific examples of infrastructure investment in his own ward cited as evidence of the benefits being realised through contributions secured through the programme of regeneration and development. Councillor Kelcher also noted the wider environmental and economic benefits associated with new development replacing older stock, in terms of energy efficiency and support for long-term financial sustainability through growth of the Council Tax base. In assessing the alternative budget proposals put forward by the Opposition Groups, he expressed the view that whilst they might contain superficially attractive elements, none were felt to represent a credible long-term plan for growing the Council's financial position, highlighting what he viewed as a policy of de-growth in the Green alternative budget which was likely to result in a worse financial position for the borough. On this basis, Councillor Kelcher advised he would be supporting the budget as moved by the Leader.

Councillor Dixon, also speaking in support of the budget proposals moved by the Leader, began by highlighting how she felt the Labour Administration had succeeded in delivering the commitments made to residents at the last local election, despite the limited support from the previous Conservative Government and notwithstanding escalating pressures in housing, adult social care and children's services. She commended the Administration for having anticipated the challenges ahead and planned accordingly, including the collaboration with other councils to share services, digitising where feasible and raising Council Tax when required, despite acknowledging the difficulty of doing so in the context of the ongoing cost of living crisis. In contrasting the Council's position with other local authorities, some of whom had needed to seek Exceptional Financial Support from Government, Councillor Dixon highlighted the balanced budget as a significant achievement requiring careful scrutiny of outgoing costs. She went on to outline a number of specific service improvements delivered by the Administration, including the establishment of welfare hubs in libraries, the provision of Family Wellbeing Centres offering essential early years support, the development of health hubs to help residents navigate council and health services, investment in development resulting in more affordable housing and regeneration projects, and initiatives to tackle fly-tipping through the Don't Mess with Brent campaign. Reference was also made to investment in parks, the use of CCTV and additional Neighbourhood Managers in addressing anti-social behaviour, the delivery of new libraries in Kilburn and Preston wards alongside the plans for a new leisure centre in Bridge Park. On this basis, Councillor Dixon expressed her pride at being part of the Administration and commended the budget to Council.

Prior to speaking in support of the alternative budget proposals moved by the Conservative Group, Councillor Mistry took the opportunity to join the Mayor and Leader in expressing her sadness at the events which had taken place at Kingsbury High School and wished those who had been injured a speedy recovery, thanking

the staff and police who had responded. Turning then to the budget, Councillor Mistry expressed the view that Brent residents deserved better than they had received under the current Labour Administration highlighting the year on year increase in Council Tax alongside what she described as deteriorating street conditions, fly-tipping, crime and antisocial behaviour and escalating costs including, as examples the significant spend on agency staff, losses through the management of supported exempt accommodation and the increasing cost in relation to the provision of temporary accommodation. In terms of specific proposals, the Conservative Group's alternative budget had included funding for additional mobile CCTV cameras, targeted enforcement and smarter prevention to address fly-tipping, an increase in reactive highways maintenance funding and fines for utility companies leaving behind poor quality repairs with concern also expressed at the excessive nature of cuts proposed with the budget proposals moved by the Leader. In commending the Conservative Group's alternative budget proposals to Council as practical, better value costed measures focussed on identified resident priorities, Councillor Mistry concluded by also taking the opportunity to thank the finance team for their guidance and assistance to all councillors and the Conservative Group during the budget process.

Councillor Knight, Cabinet Member for Customer Experience, Resident Support and Culture, then spoke and began by expressing her pride at the budget proposals moved by the Leader, which she felt were focussed on fairness and the Administration's commitment to empower every resident in Brent. Acknowledging the ongoing financial pressure faced by many households as a result of rising rents, energy bills and the wider cost of living crisis, she highlighted the role of the new National Crisis and Resilience Fund in providing support to Councils to financially assist residents across England, with Brent allocated £7.8m in 2026-27. This represented a 19% uplift on funding allocated during the previous year, which would be targeted at directly supporting residents in financial hardship and building long-term stability. In outlining the specific support provided within Brent's Crisis and Resilience Fund, Councillor Knight highlighted the funding allocated towards Discretionary Housing Payments, the prevention of homelessness and Resident Support Fund, building on support which had reached over 2,000 Brent residents in the previous year. Reference was also made to the investment in Free School Meals and holiday vouchers, the continuation of the partnership with SUFRA and funding set aside for the New Horizons Centre, Citizens Advice Brent alongside local debt advice and support for the Council's credit union. Separately, Councillor Knight highlighted an investment of over £10m to modernise libraries, leisure centres and Family Wellbeing Centres as shared spaces relied on by residents. On this basis she also commended the budget proposals to Council, which she felt demonstrated the Labour Administration's commitment to community and delivering the best outcomes for all.

Councillor Rubin, Cabinet Member for Climate Action and Community Power, also speaking in support of the budget proposals felt it important to focus his contribution on a separate but nonetheless equally significant element of the budget in relation to commissioning and procurement given its impact on the Council's ability to provide high quality public services for residents. In highlighting the efficiency savings identified within Appendix C of the budget report, he outlined the inclusion of the proposals relating to the way in which the commissioning and procurement function operated and the contribution these would make on a wider basis towards a range of services including across the public realm, resident support, community

cohesion and safety and to also to deliver what he described as the single biggest investment in tackling the climate crisis in a generation in Brent. In detailing the ways in which the budget looked to tackle the climate crisis, reference was made to investment in Green Corridors, new street and woodland trees and a low-carbon district heat network in South Kilburn which it was estimated would remove 39,000 tons of carbon from the atmosphere whilst keeping heating bills low for residents. On this basis, Councillor Rubin concluded by expressing pride in supporting the budget proposals.

Councillor Kennelly then spoke and, before turning to the budget, took the opportunity to associate himself with the comments made regarding the events at Kingsbury High School and to note a further recent incident within his ward, acknowledging the Council's support for those affected and confidence in the local Safer Neighbourhood Team to provide the necessary reassurance to local residents. Turning to the budget, he highlighted the importance of the funding being generated through precepts in resourcing the Metropolitan Police, Fire Brigade and other emergency services, and expressed particular support for the renewed focus on neighbourhood policing as a commitment of the Council, the Mayor of London and the Labour Government. In reviewing the Conservative Group's alternative budget proposals, he challenged the claim of a 1% Council Tax saving, making reference to the record of Conservative Administrations elsewhere across England most of whom, he pointed out, were also seeking to apply the maximum uplift. The need for continued support was also highlighted in terms of the priority for ongoing investment in tackling climate change as well as provision for children and young people with Councillor Kennelly concluding by urging members to support the budget as moved by the Leader on the basis that investment in young people and community infrastructure was the most effective approach to building safer communities.

Councillor Rajan-Seelan then spoke, expressing concern regarding the condition of roads in his ward, and cited specific examples of roads which he felt had been neglected for many years including the quality and completeness of repairs and management of the highways contract more generally, expressing the view that the reactive maintenance allocation within the budget was insufficient to address the level of need identified. He also drew attention to parking restrictions across his ward, which he felt were unfair to a particular community and had been damaging to local businesses, and expressed the hope that the Administration would address these issues more effectively in the year ahead.

Councillor Kabir, advising that this would be her final contribution to a Council meeting after twenty years of service as a councillor in Brent, took the opportunity to reflect on what she described as a wonderful, humbling, exhilarating and at times frustrating experience as a Council member, and expressed her gratitude to residents of Queensbury Ward, whom she had represented throughout her time as a councillor, for their cooperation and the opportunity they had given her to serve them. Turning to the budget, Councillor Kabir highlighted that the proposed Labour budget for 2026-27 was forward-looking, set against a five-year planning horizon and incorporated significant levels of revenue spend. Whilst acknowledging the proposed increase in Council Tax, reference was also made to the change in pooling arrangements relating to Business Rates for which support was expressed given the additional flexibility provided for local authorities in being able to retain a larger percentage of the income generated. She also drew members' attention to

the proposal to return money to reserves alongside the continuation of support for the Resident Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments as means of supporting the most vulnerable in the borough. Reference was made to the increase in fly-tipping fines and enhanced enforcement activity undertaken to date alongside the Council's continued contribution to funding the Freedom Pass and the Government's announcement of increased funding for SEND provision. On this basis, Councillor Kabir advised she would also be supporting the budget as moved by the Leader.

Also speaking in support of the budget proposals moved by the Leader Councillor Benea, as Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Property, began by affirming her view that this was a Labour budget to be proud of, demonstrating Labours commitment to fairness and investment for every Brent resident. Acknowledging the difficult economic context, compounded by what she described as fourteen years of Conservative and coalition-austerity which she felt had forced local authorities to bear the brunt of delivering frontline services at the expense of renewal, Councillor Benea outlined the progress being made by the Administration in delivering genuinely affordable homes at pace, working with partners who understood that Brent was open for business and committed to growth. As a specific example of recent progress, she highlighted her attendance that afternoon at the topping out ceremony for Zephaniah House, as part of the Wembley Housing Zone, providing further affordable housing provision with community space. She also drew attention to what she regarded as the decisive action being taken in South Kilburn through the procurement of a single delivery partner, enabling the regeneration of that community to proceed more efficiently and with residents at the heart of the process. Councillor Benea also highlighted the investment being made in seeking to upgrade public realm across the borough, which she felt had only been made possible by the Labour Administration's careful financial stewardship. Reference was also made to the Council's work and commitment in championing a new West London Orbital overground line as a transformative project for jobs and homes across the area as well as the ongoing advocacy for the Bakerloo Line upgrade and expansion. On the basis of the sustained, ambitious and community-focused approach reflected in the budget, Councillor Benea also therefore commended the budget proposals moved by the Leader to Council for support.

Speaking next Councillor Moeen, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Cohesion, focussed on the theme of community safety. She began by highlighting the clear message from residents across Brent that they wished to feel safe in their neighbourhoods, to see more officers present in the community and for investment to be made in young people as a means of preventing crime. On this basis, she outlined the SCIL investment to replace analogue CCTV with ultra-high-definition digital cameras and expand coverage across the borough. Members were also advised of the successful securing of CIL funding to commission additional patrol officers to address anti-social behaviour being experienced out of hours in response to resident concerns. In terms of prevention, Councillor Moeen highlighted the investment to redevelop the Gladstone Park Youth and Community Centre into a new health and wellbeing integrated hub, alongside further investment to improve facilities used by youth organisations across the borough. She concluded by contrasting the Administration's approach to investment in community safety infrastructure with what she characterised as the legacy of underinvestment left by the previous Conservative and coalition Government and commended the budget moved by the Leader as a step forward in rebuilding Brent over the longer term.

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson, Cabinet Member for Housing, then spoke and began by highlighting the housing emergency facing Brent. Concern was expressed that the alternative budget proposals from the Opposition Groups had insufficiently addressed the homelessness crisis, given that temporary accommodation costs represented one of the most significant financial pressures on the Council's budget. In setting out the context of the housing crisis, she outlined the role played by coalition government policies and years of austerity and cuts to local authority budgets, noting that across London, councils had spent £196m in a single month on temporary accommodation in the previous year. She highlighted the current Government's ambition targets to deliver new affordable homes as a welcome recognition of the need to be serious about supply and welcomed the Renters' Rights Act, including the ending of Section 21 no-fault evictions, as providing greater security for renters across the borough. In terms of the specific investment provided within the budget, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson outlined the investment committed to the Wembley Housing Zone, as well as to unlock the College of North West London site and ongoing programme of regeneration across South Kilburn. This was in addition to the additional investment in homelessness prevention given the associated social and financial benefits identified in being able to settle homeless households into permanent accommodation with an acknowledgement also provided of the support being provided by the Council's wholly-owned Housing Companies, i4B and First Wave Housing, in this respect. On the basis of what she described as the most ambitious and sustained housing investment programme delivered by the Council in a generation, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson advised she would also be supporting and commending the budget proposals to Council, as moved by the Leader.

Councillor Krupa Sheth, Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Enforcement, was next to speak in support of the budget proposals, highlighting the importance of public realm as the measure by which residents judged the Council's performance on a daily basis. In terms of the specific investment included within the budget to support the focus on this area, she highlighted the significant investment in public realm and street cleansing, CCTV and public safety, highways and transport infrastructure as well as the welcome additional funding through the Pride in Place initiative and wider investment in neighbourhoods, which had all been designed to enable residents to see and feel improvements in their streets, parks and highways. Councillor Krupa Sheth also drew attention to the significant progress achieved through the Don't Mess with Brent campaign supported by an increase in number of Enforcement Officers and increased utilisation of fines for fly-tipping through a zero-tolerance approach. Reference was also made to performance in relation to the clearance of reported fly-tips within target time and associated reduction of incidents in hotspot areas as a result of targeted enforcement and campaigns. She took the opportunity to thank the many residents who had used the Fix My Street application and concluded by also commending the budget proposals on the basis of the approach and commitment made to Pride in Place.

As a further contribution, Councillor Afzal, as initial context to his comments on the budget, began by highlighting his concern and frustration at the financial challenges faced by Brent as a result of what he felt had been the previous Government's programme of austerity and underfunding of vital public services, poor handling of the economy and indifferent approach to the most vulnerable members of society. Despite the significant challenges faced and £210m worth of cumulative budget

cuts already delivered, he felt it important to recognise how hard the Council had worked to fill the gaps created in order to safeguard and support residents expressing concern at the direction in which he felt the country as a whole was heading under the previous government with reference to the increasing reliance of residents on foodbanks, decrease in job security, unsustainable level of rents fuelling the housing crisis, increasing levels of poverty, stagnation of wages, underfunding of schools, the NHS and care provision and increasing level of divisions within society. In highlighting continued concern at the impact of corporate lobbyists on successive Government's Councillor Afzal felt it was time for a radical overhaul of the system including the introduction of a wealth based tax with the prudent and compassionate approach adopted by the Labour Administration (despite the constraint in resources) in seeking to safeguard and support local residents and those more vulnerable members of society, highlighted as a basis for his support of the budget proposals moved by the Leader.

At this stage, the Mayor advised that in accordance with the timings and process outlined at the start of the meeting he would be pausing proceedings to provide a short 15 break for members observing Ramadan to participate in Iftar. The meeting was therefore paused at 5:30pm with proceedings resuming at 5:45pm.

Resuming after the break, Councillor Maurice spoke in support of the Conservative Group's alternative budget proposals, highlighting a number of concerns regarding the Administration's approach to the budget including the continued year on year increase in Council Tax and impact on residents who, he pointed out, were finding the increases increasingly unaffordable. Attention was also drawn to the effect on contractors of the 1.5% increase in employer National Insurance contributions introduced by the Government, which he felt was contributing to rising costs for the Council. On the condition of roads and pavements, Councillor Maurice highlighted concerns he advised were consistently being raised with him by residents regarding the state of repair of the boroughs highways and footways, particularly for the most vulnerable users. In contrasting Brent's performance with that of the Conservative controlled Administration in Harrow he felt there was a need to recognise the improved positive experience being highlighted by residents in that borough following the change in Administration. On the basis of the concerns outlined, Councillor Maurice advised he was unable to support the proposals as moved by the Leader of the Council and would instead be voting in favour of the alternative proposals moved on behalf of the Conservative Group.

Moving on, Councillor Hylton speaking in support of the budget proposals moved by the Leader, was keen to endorse what she felt to be the values reflected within them relating to the protection of vital services and continued investment in the everyday priorities of residents. Highlighting a number of specific investments being delivered across her ward, including significant road resurfacing to improve safety for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians; new play and fitness equipment in Preston Park (delivered in partnership with Friends of Preston Park); action to tackle anti-social behaviour in partnership with the police and community partners; progress on plans for a new SEND school to provide high-quality specialist education closer to home; upgrades to street lighting and the development of a new community library run by volunteers alongside new affordable homes as a modern hub for learning and community life, support was also expressed for the landlord licensing regime as an example of responsible local leadership in raising standards for private renters and ensuring safe and decent housing for all. On this basis Councillor Hylton

advised that she would also be supporting the budget proposals as moved by the Leader.

Councillor Nerva, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Leisure, then spoke to highlight the direct impact of the adult health and social care budget on residents who relied on the Council when they needed support most. He drew members' attention to the scale of the service being provided, referencing the significant level of assessments carried out each year and support delivered to residents across Brent through home care, supported living and the Council-funded carer centre. In paying tribute to staff working across the Council, the NHS and the many adult social care agencies providing services in the borough, he extended his personal thanks for the care and commitment they demonstrated. Councillor Nerva also took the opportunity to note that adult social care had been largely absent from the alternative budget proposals moved by the Opposition Groups, with the exception of brief reference to carers and independent living which he indicated he was pleased to endorse. In concluding his contribution, Councillor Nerva took the opportunity to pay tribute to those colleagues who would not be standing in the next local borough election in May, thanking them for their service.

Councillor Ahmadi Moghaddam then spoke, offering a perspective which, whilst acknowledging the wider context of the budget debate, focused on concerns regarding housing standards, management and tenant accountability. He drew attention to findings from the Regulator of Social Housing highlighting serious governance failures by the Council as a landlord and expressed the view that these represented issues which formal scrutiny should have been involved in identifying. Concerns were also raised in respect of tenants in other Registered Landlord properties who had experienced steep rent and service charge increases, poor service and unfair evictions. Councillor Ahmadi Moghaddam set out what he described as a political failure associated with the stock transfer model, which had moved housing decisions further from direct democratic control, and outlined the inclusion within the Green Group's alternative budget proposals for the creation of a dedicated Housing Scrutiny Committee to provide a focus the services being delivered by all social housing and Registered Providers across the borough, including the Council. He expressed the view that a pattern of institutional protection over accountability was contributing to a loss of public trust in political institutions and on the basis outlined, therefore commended the Green Groups alternative budget proposals to Council.

As a further contribution, Councillor Fraser (speaking as an independent member of the Council) began by acknowledging the efforts of all colleagues in producing the budget proposals before reflecting on a number of issues which she felt merited attention. These included the approach to the development of Bridge Park and the need to ensure that the original business unit element for young people was not overlooked in the plans for redevelopment, the impact of parking charges and Council Tax increases on residents, concerns about anti-social behaviour and the need for more effective enforcement of behavioural standards along with the engagement of young people in conversations around the use of CIL funding. Hope was expressed that the additional resources identified in the budget would do more than simply balance the books and, on the basis of assurances regarding the action to tackle the impact of anti-social behaviour, indicated that she was broadly supportive of the budget proposals as moved.

Following on, Councillor Molloy also spoke in support of the budget proposals moved by the Leader and in opening his contribution highlighted the significant financial risks which the Administration had managed to navigate in avoiding the prospect of a Section 114 notice or the need to seek Exceptional Financial Support. In commending what he felt to be the responsible approach adopted within the budget proposals he ended by contrasting this with the approach he felt had been adopted by the Opposition Groups in terms of the alternative budget proposals they had moved, which he confirmed he would not be supporting.

In continuing the debate Councillor Clinton then spoke to outline his support of the Liberal Democrats Group's alternative budget proposals, and in doing so began by seeking to challenge the Administration's performance in the delivery of social, affordable housing, especially when compared to other borough's citing Sutton as an example. The opportunity was also taken to dispute characterisation of the Liberal Democrats' alternative budget as financially irresponsible, noting that their proposals were also designed to increase reserves and utilise infrastructure levy funding for the purposes it was intended in contrast to what he described as the Council's approach in accumulating and retaining CIL funding. In turning to the condition of roads and pavements, Councillor Clinton highlighted the concerns raised by residents across the borough and reminded members that the Liberal Democrats had submitted budget amendments seeking additional investment in roads, pavements and street cleaning over a number of previous years which had been consistently rejected by the Labour Administration. Concerns were also raised at the timing of the release of CIL funding by the current Administration in the specific build up to an election after previously asserting that the use to which it was now being invested had not been permissible. In commending the Liberal Democrats' alternative budget proposals including the proposed level of additional investment in street cleaning, highway maintenance and repairs from strategic CIL reserves, he hoped all members would support the approach outlined, which he felt residents deserved.

As a further contribution to the debate, Councillor Chohan also took the opportunity (as his final contribution at a Council meeting) to reflect on his time serving as a councillor and to express his support for the budget proposals moved by the Leader, highlighting the ongoing impact and difficulties being created for an increasing number of residents as a result of the previous Conservative Governments approach towards austerity and funding of public services. Despite the significant challenges and pressures on public services created as result, Councillor Chohan highlighted his pride at the way in which the current Administration had sought to protect key services whilst also supporting the delivery of new affordable homes, services for young people and local and those more vulnerable residents. Whilst acknowledging that the budget proposals would require difficult decisions to be made, Councillor Chohan was keen to commend the compassionate approach adopted in seeking to protect the most vulnerable and continuing to work for local communities particularly on issues such as the approach towards tackling knife crime and youth violence working in partnership with key stakeholders and local community organisations and on this basis, hoped members would join him in support of the budget proposals moved by the Leader.

As an additional contribution made in support of the budget proposals moved by the Leader, Councillor Dar, also spoke to highlight the impact of the specific investments being delivered for residents across his ward in Cricklewood and

Mapesbury. These included the refurbishment of the playground in Gladstone Park, provision of a new health centre, installation of additional CCTV, delivery of new affordable homes alongside infrastructure investment in local youth organisations including Cricklewood Boxing Club and the Jason Roberts Foundation. The opportunity was also taken to highlight the contribution and support provided by a number of voluntary and community organisations across the ward, working in partnership with the Council to deliver key services for vulnerable residents and to commend the refurbishment of Cricklewood Library recognising the contribution made by the local community and organisations in this respect. Outlining the way in which he felt the budget reflected the fact that Brent remained a borough with much to be proud of, he also ended by commending the budget proposals as moved by the Leader for approval.

Speaking next, Councillor Long highlighted the issue of pavement parking as a matter requiring attention in the context of future budgets, noting that investment in highways and footways would be undermined if vehicles continued to be permitted to park on pavements. She outlined the particular extent of the problem in the north of the borough, noting the concentration of zones where pavement parking was permitted in wards including Alperton and Welsh Harp, and contrasted this with the more clearly demarcated arrangements in areas covered by Controlled Parking Zones. As such, it was hoped the issue could be addressed moving forward to maximise the impact of the additional investment being provided in highway and footway maintenance and repairs and the wider public realm. Councillor Long also reiterated her longstanding advocacy for the provision of public toilet facilities in the borough's parks, noting that no provision for the maintenance of park toilets had been included in any of the budget proposals presented for consideration.

Moving on Councillor Lesley Smith, also speaking in support of the budget proposals moved by the Leader, commended the budget on the basis of the security it sought to provide for residents. As specific points of reference she highlighted the significant level of investment in delivery of the Wembley Housing Zone and programme of regeneration across South Kilburn including provision of a district heating network alongside the ongoing delivery of affordable social housing and work being undertaken to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation to increase stability for those in greatest need which it was felt represented one of the core duties for any local authority. She expressed the hope that those who had chosen to oppose the budget would reflect on their obligations to the residents they had been elected to represent and in particular on the investment being made in special educational needs provision, youth services and the protection of the most vulnerable and on this basis also commended the budget proposals to Council.

Joining his colleagues in congratulating the Administration and finance team on the production of a balanced budget, Councillor Mahmood advised he was also proud to form part of an Administration seeking to place residents at the heart of everything it did guided by the values of respect, equality and fairness. Before concluding, Councillor Mahmood took the opportunity to pay specific tribute to Councillor Kabir for her long service to the residents of Brent and to extend his thanks to all other councillors who would not be standing in the upcoming local election for their service to the Council. On this basis of the values outlined he ended by also commending and expressing his support for the budget proposals moved by the Leader.

As a final contribution to the debate, Councillor Johnson expressed his wholehearted support for the budget proposals, highlighting the fundamental purpose of the Council as supporting its residents. He commended the budget for shielding the most vulnerable members of the community through measures including the Resident Support Fund, designed to assist residents navigating the cost of living crisis, alongside the Council Tax support scheme and, once again on the basis of the values he felt had been reflected within them, hoped all members would join him in supporting the budget proposals as moved by the Leader.

Having concluded the debate, the Mayor thanked all members for their contributions and then invited Councillor Muhammed Butt to summarise and respond to the points raised.

In response to the debate, Councillor Muhammed Butt began by thanking all members for their contributions at the meeting. In summing up, he felt that the debate had demonstrated the commitment and passion amongst councillors to deliver for their residents as well as the focus of the Labour Administration in seeking to deliver on the mandate provided by residents and lead responsibly in setting a balanced budget despite the difficult nature of decisions having to be made. In responding to the alternative budget proposals, he also expressed concern at the financial and budgetary literacy which he felt had been demonstrated in terms of their approach given the associated risks which had been identified in relation to their impact and way in which they had failed to address key areas of responsibility and demand relating to the elderly and young.

In contrast, he felt the Administration's budget proposals not only demonstrated an understanding of the challenges faced but were also designed to protect and support residents and growth across the borough, with reference (as an example) made to delivery of investment in a financially prudent way to support:

- the continued regeneration and growth of the borough;
- work in partnership with the police and other partners to keep the borough safe;
- an ongoing focus on Council performance and procurement arrangements to maximise the level of social value being generated;
- a focus on customer service to and empowering local residents and groups to actively contribute to improving their neighbourhoods alongside ongoing support for Brent's libraries;
- the protection of services for young people, including provision of additional SEND places to ensure they had the best start in life;
- the delivery of secure, accessible and affordable housing options for residents alongside action to protect tenants and drive up standards;
- The ongoing provision of support to elderly and vulnerable residents including ongoing assistance to residents facing financial difficulties with bills and

essential needs through the Resident Support Fund and advice and guidance available through Brent Hubs;

- The ongoing focus on improvements to the public realm (including repairs and maintenance, street cleaning and environmental enforcement) alongside schemes to encourage more active modes of travel and support the maintenance and enhancement of the boroughs parks and open spaces.

In concluding, whilst recognising the difficult nature of decisions which had needed to be made, he outlined his pride that despite the challenges highlighted during the debate the Labour Administration had been able to present a balanced budget that would deliver investment designed to not only prioritise essential services for the well-being of local residents but would also seek to foster a spirit of growth and empowerment in order to meet the needs and aspirations of communities across the borough and deliver on the commitments made. In thanking everyone who had contributed towards the budget consultation process along with the Finance Team and all other officers involved for their efforts and support in preparing the budget proposals Councillor Muhammed Butt ended by once again commending the budget to Council.

Having thanked Councillor Muhammed Butt for his closing comments, the Mayor advised that this now concluded the debate on the budget and he would therefore be moving to the vote on the alternative budget proposals and then (subject to any amendments agreed) the recommended budget moved by the Leader of the Council.

As the recommendations to be considered related to the budget setting process he reminded Members that, in accordance with Standing Order 43, these would all need to be subject to a recorded vote. The Mayor then moved on to put the budget and alternative proposals to the vote.

On a recorded vote being taken the budget proposals, as moved by the Leader of the Council were declared **CARRIED**.

Accordingly, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- (1) Agree an overall 4.99% increase in the Council's element of Council Tax for 2026/27, with 2% as a precept for Adult Social Care and a 2.99% general increase.
- (2) Agree the General Fund revenue budget for 2026/27, as summarised in Appendices A and B of the report.
- (3) Agree the savings proposals for 2026/27, as set out in Appendix C (i) of the report.
- (4) Note the Equalities Impact Assessments on the budget proposals, as set out in Appendices C (ii) and C (iii) of the report.
- (5) Note the report from the Budget Scrutiny Task Group in Appendix D of the report.

- (6) Agree the HRA budget and business plan for 2026/27 as set out in section 12 and Appendix P of the report.
- (7) Agree the Dedicated Schools Grant, as set out in section 13 of the report.
- (8) Agree the changes to the existing Capital Programme in relation to additions of new schemes and reprofiling, as set out in section 14 and Appendix E of the report and note the Capital Pipeline Schemes in Appendix F of the report.
- (9) Agree the use of £2.9m of unrestricted right to buy receipts for capital works to improve HRA housing and enfranchisement (renewal of leaseholds approaching expiry).
- (10) Agree the Capital Strategy, the Investment Strategy, the Treasury Management Strategy and the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement as set out in Appendices G, H, I and J of the report.
- (11) Agree the Reserves Strategy and schedule of reserves, as set out in Appendices K (i) and K (ii) of the report.
- (12) Agree the Fees and Charges Policy and Schedule of Fees and Charges, as set out in Appendices L (i) and L (ii) of the report.
- (13) Note the results of the budget consultation, as set out in section 11 and detailed in Appendix M of the report.
- (14) Note the legal advice from the Director of Law, as set out in Appendix N of the report.
- (15) Agree the Pay Policy Statement for 2026/27, as set out in Appendix O of the report.

Council Tax recommendations

In relation to the Council Tax for 2026/27 it was **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To note that, at the time of despatch of this report, the GLA had not issued its precept for 2026/27 and was scheduled to agree its precept on 26 February 2026.
- (2) As a result of (1) above, that Council refer the final setting of the Council Tax for the year 2026-27 to the Council Tax Setting Committee, in accordance with section 67(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 with that meeting to take place on 27 February 2026 in order to allow Council Tax notices to be issued in line with the normal statutory timetable.
- (3) To note the Terms of Reference of the Council Tax Setting Committee for 2026/27 as set out in in Appendix Q (i) of the report.
- (4) To note the composition of the Council Tax Setting Committee as appointed at the Annual Council Meeting on 14 May 2025.

- (5) To recommend the formal resolution set out in Appendix Q (ii) of the report, to the meeting of the Council Tax Setting Committee, to formally set the Council Tax for 2026/27.

Prior to the above recommendations being approved, the alternative budget proposals moved as amendments to the budget report by the Conservative, Liberal Democrats and Green Groups were put to the vote and declared LOST.

The voting recorded on the amendment moved by the Conservative Group was as follows:

For the Amendment (5): Councillors Kansagra, Maurice, Mistry, Jayanti Patel & Rajan-Seelan.

Against the Amendment (42): Councillors Afzal, Agha, Ahmadi-Moghaddam, Ahmed, Akram, Benea, M.Butt, S.Butt, Chohan, Choudry, Clinton, Conneely, Crabb, Dar, Dixon, Donnelly-Jackson, Ethapemi, Farah, Fraser, Gbajumo, Grahl, Hylton, Johnson, Kabir, Kelcher, Kennelly, Knight, Long, Lorber, Mahmood, Matin, Miller, Mitchell, Moeen, Molloy, Nerva, Mili Patel, Rubin, Shah, Ketan Sheth, Krupa Sheth and L.Smith.

Abstentions to the Amendment (2): Councillors Hack (Mayor) and Bajwa (Deputy Mayor).

The voting recorded on the amendment moved by the Green Group was as follows:

For the Amendment (5): Councillors Ahmadi Moghaddam, Ethapemi, Farah, Gbajumo and Mitchell.

Against the Amendment (42): Councillors Afzal, Agha, Ahmed, Akram, Benea, M.Butt, S.Butt, Chohan, Choudry, Clinton, Conneely, Crabb, Dar, Dixon, Donnelly-Jackson, Fraser, Grahl, Hylton, Johnson, Kabir, Kansagra, Kelcher, Kennelly, Knight, Long, Lorber, Mahmood, Maurice, Matin, Miller, Mistry, Moeen, Molloy, Nerva, Jayanti Patel, Mili Patel, Rajan Seelan, Rubin, Shah, Ketan Sheth, Krupa Sheth and L.Smith.

Abstentions to the Amendment (2): Councillors Hack (Mayor) and Bajwa (Deputy Mayor).

The voting recorded on the amendment moved by the Liberal Democrats Group was as follows:

For the Amendment (3): Councillors Clinton, Lorber and Matin.

Against the Amendment (44): Councillors Afzal, Agha, Ahmadi Moghaddam, Ahmed, Akram, Benea, M.Butt, S.Butt, Chohan, Choudry, Conneely, Crabb, Dar, Dixon, Donnelly-Jackson, Ethapemi, Farah, Fraser, Gbajumo, Grahl, Hylton, Johnson, Kabir, Kansagra, Kelcher, Kennelly, Knight, Long, Mahmood, Maurice, Miller, Mistry, Mitchell, Moeen, Molloy, Nerva, Jayanti Patel, Mili Patel, Rajan Seelan, Rubin, Shah, Ketan Sheth, Krupa Sheth and L.Smith.

Abstentions to the Amendment (2): Councillors Hack (Mayor) and Bajwa (Deputy Mayor).

The voting recorded on the substantive recommendations, as detailed above, was as follows:

For (33): Councillors Afzal, Agha, Ahmed, Akram, Benea, M.Butt, S.Butt, Chohan, Choudry, Conneely, Crabb, Dar, Dixon, Donnelly-Jackson, Grahl, Hylton, Johnson, Kabir, Kelcher, Kennelly, Knight, Long, Mahmood, Miller, Moeen, Molloy, Nerva, Mili Patel, , Rubin, Shah, Ketan Sheth, Krupa Sheth and L.Smith.

Against (13): Councillors Ahmadi-Moghaddam, Clinton, Ethapemi, Farah Gbajumo, Kansagra, Lorber, Matin. Maurice, Mistry, Mitchell, Jayanti Patel and Rajan Seelan.

Abstentions (3): Councillors Hack (Mayor), Bajwa (Deputy Mayor) and Fraser.

11. **Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2025-2026**

The Mayor then invited Councillor Mili Patel, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources, to introduce the report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources updating members on Treasury Management activity for the first half of the 2025-26 financial year. Members noted that the report had also been considered and agreed by the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee on 3 December 2025 and Cabinet on 19 January 2026 who had agreed to refer it on to Council for consideration in compliance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management.

In introducing the report, Councillor Mili Patel advised that as part of the Council's ongoing commitment to financial transparency, the mid-year review included details on the Council's borrowing requirement, cash investment balances and compliance with the Prudential Indicators enabling Brent to meet its financial obligations. Members were reminded that as part of the approach outlined in terms of managing Treasury Management activity to support the Council's priorities, it was only possible to borrow for capital investment and not to fund operational day-to-day expenditure, for example, to offset the increasing financial pressures being experienced within the revenue budget.

As a result of the Council's careful financial stewardship and compliance with Prudential Indicators, Councillor Mili Patel outlined the ongoing approach towards the repayment of loans along with investment in the Council's capital programme, where possible, including key projects in Alperton and Staples Corner alongside work to increase the supply of affordable housing, support the Council's move towards net zero, upgrading of leisure centres at Vale Farm & Willesden, support Family Wellbeing Centres and the move towards more active forms of travel. In highlighting the ongoing commitment towards seeking opportunities to borrow in as sustainable a way as possible to deliver on key infrastructure projects the Council's borrowing strategy was therefore recognised as continuing to address the key issue of affordability without compromising the longer-term stability of the debt portfolio

In outlining the importance of the Council's Treasury Management function in underpinning all Borough Plan priorities and in ensuring the Council was able to continue meeting its financial obligations, including those associated with the

affordability and delivery of the Capital Programme, the opportunity was taken to thank officers for their support in providing clear direction and delivery of the Council's Treasury Management activity. In commending the report to Council, Councillor Mili Patel ended by highlighting how this was again felt to demonstrate the prudent approach adopted in terms of the financial management required to support delivery of the Council's wider ambitions and priorities.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Mili Patel for introducing the report and as no other members had indicated they wished to speak, and Councillor Mili Patel advised she did not wish to exercise any right of reply, he then moved to put the recommendations to the vote, which were unanimously declared **CARRIED**

Council therefore **RESOLVED** to note (in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice) the 2025-26 Mid-Year Treasury report detailing overall financial performance up to Quarter Two, which had been fully compliant with the Council's Treasury Prudential Indicators set as part of the annual strategy.

12. **Members' Allowance Scheme Annual Review 2026-27**

As the final item on the agenda, the Mayor then invited Councillor Mili Patel, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources, to introduce a report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources seeking approval to the proposed Members Allowance Scheme for the 2026-27 financial year.

Councillor Mili Patel moved the report as presented within the agenda (without further comment). Having thanked Councillor Mili Patel, the Mayor then drew members attention to an amendment submitted by Councillor Lorber on behalf of the Liberal Democrats Group to the proposed Members Allowance Scheme, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

In moving the amendment, Councillor Lorber felt it important to reflect on the nature of the budget debate which had been undertaken at the meeting and current financial pressures being experienced by the Council, which he felt supported the need for a wider review of expenditure across a number of areas including the provision of Special Responsibility Allowances relating to a number of positions within the current members allowance scheme which it was also felt reflected the need for a wider democratic reset. On this basis, the amendment moved by Councillor Lorber was as follows:

- (1) To amend the list of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) proposed under the 2026-27 Members Allowance Scheme, as detailed within Appendix 1 of the report, as follows:
 - (a) In accordance with the Liberal Democrats alternative budget proposals, reduce Cabinet to 6 members (comprising the Leader and 5 other Cabinet Members) removing the need to provide 4 Cabinet Member SRAs.
 - (b) Abolish the current SRA for the position of Deputy Leader (£30,891) and reduce that SRA to the normal Cabinet Member SRA level (£20,354)
 - (c) Remove SRA for the position of Deputy Mayor (£3,449)

- (d) Remove the SRA currently payable to the Group Whip for the Majority Party (£4,265), reflecting this is a purely political position.
 - (e) Reduce the SRA level for the position of Scrutiny Chair and Chair of Planning Committee from £15,229 to £9,000 pa
 - (f) End payment of the SRAs (£2,120) to the Chairs of Brent Connects Area Consultative Forums – with these meetings to be chaired by Neighbourhood Managers in future.
- (2) To add, as an additional recommendation - A further review of the SRAs payable under the Members Allowance Scheme be undertaken following the local elections on 7 May 2026.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Lorber for moving the amendment before inviting other members to speak, with the following contribution received.

Speaking in further support of the amendment, Councillor Clinton felt it important to recognise the basis of the changes being sought given the need to ensure that where flexibility and choice was available funding was being utilised as effectively as possible and providing maximum value for residents across the borough.

With no other members indicating they wished to speak the Mayor then invited Councillor Mili Patel (as mover of the report) followed by Councillor Lorber (as mover of the amendment) to exercise their right of reply.

Prior to the rights of reply being made, the Mayor advised that as the remaining time available was shortly due to expire he intended to move the suspension of Standing Order 44 (Council Guillotine Procedure) in order to extend the time of the meeting by a period of 10 minutes, to enable completion of the agenda. In accordance with Standing Order 42 (d) the procedural motion was put to the vote without further discussion and declared **CARRIED**.

In exercising her right of reply, Councillor Mili Patel began by highlighting the importance of the allowance scheme as a mechanism for ensuring that people from all walks of life and as diverse backgrounds as possible were able to represent and serve their communities. In recognising the importance of the representational role undertaken by members alongside the increasing challenge in terms of managing demand and supporting the delivery of local services, it was felt the allowance scheme needed to reflect the nature of roles covered along with volume of casework generated in seeking to fulfil the requirements of each position, with it pointed out that the allowances payable under the scheme were allocated according to roles and not the individual. Whilst supportive of the principle relating to fair pay it was pointed out that the annual review process had, however, also been designed to recognise the challenging financial environment in which the Council was operating. In light of the wider pressures identified and need to prioritise key frontline services for residents, the report had therefore been moved on the basis of no inflationary uplift being recommended to the Member Allowance Scheme in the level of basic, special responsibility and civic allowances payable for 2026-27. In summing up, Councillor Mili Patel felt this represented the fairest approach and in advising the Labour Group would not be supporting the

amendment also highlighted what was felt to be the contradiction in the stance taken by opposition members in the Green Group in seeking to remove the allowances for certain positions as part of the alternative budget proposals they had moved, given their acceptance of SRAs when serving in their various previous roles within the Majority Group as including as Whip, Brent Connect Chair and Cabinet Member.

As a final contribution, the Mayor then invited Councillor Lorber to speak who, in exercising his right of reply, highlighted what he felt was also a need to consider the level of allowance paid for the role of Deputy Leader, given the current remit in relation to control and management of the Council's overall financial position and successive levels of overspend identified as part of the ongoing in year budget monitoring process.

Having thanked members for their contributions, the Mayor then moved to the vote on the report starting with the amendment moved by the Liberal Democrats Group.

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

The Mayor then moved on to put the substantive recommendations, as set out in the original report circulated with the agenda, to a vote which were declared **CARRIED**.

Council therefore **RESOLVED**:

- (1) To approve the Members Allowance Scheme in the proposed terms set out within the report for the 2026-27 Financial Year.
- (2) To authorise the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources to comply with the statutory requirements to publicise the Council's Members' Allowance Scheme.

13. **Urgent Business**

There were no urgent items of business raised at the meeting.

As this was his final Council meeting as Mayor, Councillor Hack ended proceedings by taking the opportunity to thank members for their support and cooperation over the year. Members were reminded that the next Full Council meeting would now fall after the local elections, with the Annual Council and Mayor Making Meeting having been scheduled for Wednesday 20 May 2006. The Mayor therefore formally closed proceedings by taking the opportunity to pay tribute to those members not standing in the local borough elections for their public service, dedication and commitment to the residents of Brent and to wish them well for the future.

The meeting closed at 6.45 pm

COUNCILLOR RYAN HACK
Mayor