



## LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

### MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on 4 March 2026 at 5:15PM

PRESENT: Councillor Ketan Sheth (Chair), Councillor Afzal (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Clinton, Ethapemi and Mistry.

ALSO PRESENT: Co-opted members Archdeacon Catherine Pickford, Rachele Goldberg, and Alloysius Frederick

#### **1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

Councillor Ketan Sheth (as Chair) welcomed members of the Scrutiny Committee to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mahmood, Aden and T. Smith.

#### **2. Declarations of Interests**

Personal interests were declared as follows:

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

#### **3. Deputations (if any)**

No deputations were received at the meeting.

#### **4. Minutes of the previous meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meetings held on Monday 19 January 2026 be approved as a correct record.

#### **5. Matters arising (if any)**

There were no matters arising raised at the meeting.

#### **6. Reduction in operating hours at the Urgent Treatment Centre located at Central Middlesex Hospital**

Prior to the consideration of the item, the Chair agreed to consider a request which had been received to speak under item 6, in relation to the Urgent Treatment Centre at Central Middlesex Hospital, from a member of the public, Amandine Alexandre, who highlighted the following points:

- Amandine Alexandre began by stating that, from the 1 February 2026, the Urgent Treatment Centre at Central Middlesex Hospital had ceased operating between 9pm and midnight. It was emphasised that this had constituted a significant alteration to the service, yet patients had not been informed of the change before the reduction in opening hours had taken effect. The speaker reported that they had become aware of the new hours only through a photograph that had been posted on Facebook on the 2 February 2026.
- The speaker believed that this absence of communication, prior to the introduction of new operating hours, represented very poor practice on the part of London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust. It was further stated that this lack of communication had nevertheless been entirely in keeping with the consultation process undertaken by the Trust in October of the previous year.
- Amandine Alexandre recalled that the consultation had been extremely brief, lasting only a couple of weeks at most. It was stated that this had predictably resulted in a very limited number of responses from patients, with only 42 participants. The speaker contrasted this with the 570 signatures that had been collected for a petition hosted on the Council's website earlier in the year.
- The speaker advised that there was considerably more to be said about both the decision itself and its consequences for patients. The speaker stated that the Trust had encouraged patients to make use of community pharmacies and their GP practices as a mitigation for the loss of the late evening service at the Urgent Treatment Centre. The speaker reported that they had identified only one pharmacy within 2.5 miles of their home that remained open until 10pm.
- Amandine Alexandre also referred to the difficulties encountered when attempting to access their general practitioner services and cited the example of being required to complete a form described as Patches. It was stated that each use of the form had caused them to feel as though they were being cross examined by a barrister in relation to an offence they had not committed.

- In concluding their presentation to the Committee, Amandine Alexandre encouraged the Committee to remind London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust of the standards that patients were entitled to expect. It was further emphasised that the NHS existed to serve patients and should not implement significant changes to services without appropriate consultation and without ensuring that patients were properly informed. Amandine Alexandre described the request as simple but important and expressed the hope that the Committee would take action.

The Chair thanked Amandine Alexandre for addressing the Committee and then invited Pippa Nightingale (Chief Executive Officer, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust) to deliver a briefing in relation to the Urgent Treatment Centre at Central Middlesex Hospital.

In presenting the briefing, members noted that the Urgent Treatment Centre (UTC) at Central Middlesex Hospital had reduced its opening hours from 8:00am - 00:00pm to 8:00 am - 21:00pm, with the final patient registration at 20:00pm. The Committee were informed that the London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust (LNWH) currently operated 3 urgent care centres - namely, Central Middlesex Hospital, Ealing Hospital and Northwick Park Hospital. Members heard that data collected by the Trust had demonstrated that between 21:00 and 00:00 significantly fewer patients were attending the Central Middlesex Hospital site. It was explained that the urgent care service during this period had been staffed by a minimal clinical team, consisting of 1 doctor and 2 nurses. The Committee were advised that, in light of the very low numbers of patients presenting in those hours, this staffing model had not represented an efficient use of resources. Pippa Nightingale then outlined operational issues that had arisen at the Central Middlesex Hospital site prior to the change. Members were informed that patient pathways had become disjointed, with some individuals using the facility for urgent care needs that would have been more appropriately addressed through alternative clinical routes. It was reported that the service had been seeing between 40 and 50 patients who, as a consequence of the disjointed pathways and limited diagnostic availability in the late evening, experienced extended waiting times and, in many cases, required transfer to different sites to complete their care. The Committee were further advised that following the revisions to the operational model and opening hours, there had been a marked improvement in performance. It was stated that the Trust had achieved 100% compliance with patients being seen within 4 hours at the Central Middlesex Hospital Urgent Treatment Centre. Members were informed that this outcome represented the intended improvement in patient flow and clinical pathway efficiency arising from the revised operating hours.

In continuing the presentation to the Committee, Pippa Nightingale reported that a comprehensive public engagement process had been undertaken. This included two engagement events held both in person and online attendance. It was further stated that a questionnaire had been disseminated through all patient communication channels and that engagement levels had been good. Members were advised that the feedback received indicated that there would be minimal impact on patients as a result of the revised operating model. It was noted that the Ealing site had been used as a point of comparison in understanding urgent care usage and patient behaviours. It was emphasised that urgent care attendance was distinct from attendance at a GP or a pharmacy, and that the changes had been configured to signpost patients to the right service in the right place. The Committee were further advised that, through the transition to the revised hours, no complaints had been received from patients.

The Chair thanked Pippa Nightingale for her presentation to the Committee and then moved on to invite members to ask questions in relation to the information presented, with the following being noted:

- As an initial question, members noted that the reduction in operating hours represented a significant change from the previous year. Concern was expressed regarding the distance between the Trust's three hospital sites and the potential impact on transfer times. Reference was made to winter pressures, during which large numbers of patients required triage and were often waiting in corridors. Views were sought on what would happen in circumstances where an individual had suffered a stroke and was not receiving timely care. In response, Pippa Nightingale (Chief Executive Officer, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust) clarified that an individual experiencing a stroke would not attend an Urgent Treatment Centre but would instead be taken directly to an Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department. Members were advised that the Urgent Treatment Centre focused on minor illnesses and injuries. The importance of ensuring that patients entered the correct clinical pathway from the outset was emphasised so that they received the appropriate level of care.
- In sharing a personal experience of attending the Urgent Treatment Centre, a member stated that there was a significant assumption that members of the public knew where they should go in an emergency, yet even as a councillor they had not been aware of the correct point of access during their own emergency visit. The member reported that they had queued for a long period before being referred elsewhere and had then waited an additional hour to be seen. It was questioned why services appeared so determined to direct patients to Northwick Park Hospital and whether the Trust was satisfied that this model was functioning effectively. In response, Pippa Nightingale (Chief

Executive Officer, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust) conveyed that national promotion was needed to encourage patients to use the correct triage routes in an emergency, including the use of NHS 111. The need to promote the Talk Before You Walk initiative was emphasised to ensure that patients received the correct clinical advice and were directed to the appropriate site. It was additionally stated that ensuring patients were routed to the correct pathway was essential to improving patient care and achieving more effective clinical outcomes.

- Members noted that when the NHS initiated a reduction in operating hours for the Urgent Treatment Centre at Central Middlesex Hospital, residents often feared that services would eventually disappear altogether. Assurance was sought that the Urgent Treatment Centre itself would not be removed in the future. In response, Pippa Nightingale (Chief Executive Officer, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust) advised that Central Middlesex Hospital had more services than ever before and that it was regarded as one of the best hospital estates in London. It was stated that significant elective and specialist services had been introduced, including a new endoscopy suite. Members were further advised that the Trust was making maximum use of the available facilities. It was additionally stated that the reduction in Urgent Treatment Centre hours was not driven by financial considerations but by the need to allocate resources where demand existed and where patients were presenting.
- Concern was expressed that approximately 40 people had taken part in the engagement exercise, stating that this represented a very small proportion of the population served by Central Middlesex Hospital. Details were sought on what more could have been done to secure a higher response rate. In response, Pippa Nightingale (Chief Executive Officer, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust) explained that the Trust always sought to engage as widely as possible, although engagement activity had to be undertaken within specific timeframes. It was further explained that the change in opening hours had to be implemented before the winter period, which was the busiest time of year for the service. Members were advised that engagement had been carried out through all the Trust's communication channels, which were described as proactive channels with strong user voices. It was stated that engagement levels often varied depending on the nature of the proposed change. In this case, usage during the affected hours had been extremely low, meaning that relatively few individuals were impacted.
- Questions were raised around whether the engagement process had been sufficiently comprehensive, particularly in terms of the number of individuals

who had been consulted and who had responded. It was noted that data indicated that a petition containing 570 signatures had been submitted opposing the reduction in hours. Members queried whether the petition had been considered by the Trust before implementing the change and whether an Equality Impact Assessment had examined the demographic composition of individuals who might require access to the Urgent Treatment Centre. In response, Pippa Nightingale (Chief Executive Officer, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust) advised that the exercise undertaken had been an engagement process rather than a formal consultation and that the changes did not meet the NHS threshold for a statutory consultation. It was reported that engagement activity had taken place and that written and verbal feedback from both face to face and virtual sessions had been collected and analysed. It was noted that the petition had not been submitted until after the change had been implemented. Engagement had commenced in October 2025, the revised hours had taken effect in February 2026, and the petition had been received subsequent to that date. Members were further advised that the Trust continued to monitor the situation and had not received any complaints or identified any clinical issues arising from the change. Members heard that feedback had been positive in terms of staff being able to see patients more efficiently.

- Members expressed concern about pressure on Northwick Park Hospital, which was described as extremely busy and were keen to seek details on why the reinstatement of two A&E Departments was not being considered. Members further expressed a desire to see a holistic service provision across the borough. It was also questioned whether the Trust believed that the right facilities were located in the right places. In response, Pippa Nightingale (Chief Executive Officer, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust) highlighted that this issue formed part of a wider strategic discussion across London regarding A &E services. It was also noted that consideration of Office for National Statistics (ONS) population data, including evidence that populations had shifted from inner to outer boroughs, had informed service planning, including additional capacity that had been introduced at Northwick Park Hospital over the previous 2 months to manage increased demand.

The Chair thanked Pippa Nightingale for responding to the Committee's questions and then moved on to invite her to provide an update on the position at Northwick Park Hospital in relation to sickle cell and the hydrotherapy pool:

- In providing an update, Pippa Nightingale (Chief Executive Officer, London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust) advised members that the hydrotherapy pool at Northwick Park Hospital had closed in August 2025. It was explained that, following the closure, the Trust had worked with Local

Authorities and local sports centres to ensure that hydrotherapy facilities continued to be available within the community. It was reported that provision had been established within approximately 2 to 3 sports centres, supported by staff from London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust but operated by Local Authority-run facilities. It was confirmed that patients had been accessing those facilities successfully. Members were further advised that direct referral pathways were in place to the Hospital in Stanmore, and that this arrangement was functioning smoothly, with no recent concerns raised regarding patient experience or service capacity.

- Turning to sickle cell services, Pippa Nightingale described the programme as a progressive plan that had been developed with extensive patient engagement, particularly from the sickle cell community in Brent. Members were informed that significant improvements had been made and that the response from patients had been very positive. It was reported that a 24/7 tertiary access centre had opened in Hammersmith, specialising in haematology and sickle cell care. Patients were able to contact the centre directly, and paramedics were able to convey patients there during a crisis. This ensured that all patients had access to a tertiary facility when in the most acute stages of illness. The centre had been operational since January 2026. As part of Phase II, the Dedicated Sickle Cell Day Service had now opened at the Central Middlesex Hospital site. It was explained that the previous medical day service had been moved because sickle cell patients had reported anxiety when sharing clinical space with patients who were attending to receive antibiotics or who had active infections. The medical day service had therefore been relocated to Ealing Hospital, where demand was highest, and the day service at Central Middlesex Hospital was now fully dedicated to sickle cell patients and staffed by specialist clinicians. It was confirmed that this change had been well received by the sickle cell patient community. With regard to Phase III, Pippa Nightingale informed members that the next stage of the programme was to extend the opening of the Dedicated Sickle Cell Day Service to 7 days per week, as it was currently operating 5 days per week. Members were informed that the Trust aimed to deliver this within the next 6 months. Pippa Nightingale concluded by noting that Brent had one of the largest sickle cell populations in the country and that the borough now had an exemplary sickle cell pathway in place.

In seeking to bring consideration of the item to a close, the Chair thanked Pippa Nightingale and members for their contributions towards scrutiny of the briefing on the 'Reduction in operating hours at the Urgent Treatment Centre located at Central Middlesex Hospital'. As a result of the outcome of the discussion, the following recommendations were AGREED:

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- That the reduction in operating hours be reconsidered on the basis of a more comprehensive engagement exercise, enabling a wider range of service users and stakeholders to contribute to the assessment.

- That population growth data be provided, together with analysis to identify the broader strategic context for service provision and to determine whether any gaps in provision existed.

## **7. Housing Management: Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Brent Housing Management (BHM) Performance**

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) was invited to introduce the Housing Management: Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Brent Housing Management (BHM) Performance Report. In presenting, it was stated that housing remained one of the defining issues for Brent, and that the quality of housing management was central to how residents experienced their council. It was noted that the Council continued to face a significant level of challenge arising from rising homelessness and structural financial constraints. It was emphasised that the Council remained fully committed to delivering safe, secure and decent homes for all residents who relied upon its services. Reference was made to the broader national context following the tragedy at Grenfell Tower, the death of Awaab Ishak which had led to the introduction of Awaab's Law, and the strengthening of building and fire safety requirements. It was stated that it was essential that tenants were placed at the centre of everything the Council did in this area. It was observed that safe, secure and decent homes were a foundation for a fair and thriving borough and were not optional for any responsible housing authority. Members were informed that the report before the Committee set out an overview of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures and the performance of Brent Housing Management. It was explained that the Tenant Satisfaction Measures provided one of the core mechanisms through which the Council assessed tenant views and their experience of the housing service.

In continuing the presentation, Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) added that current performance was not always at the level that residents expected and that such a position was not tenable. It was stated that the report represented a transparent and accurate account of the issues, the improvements achieved to date, and the changes being delivered. The measures put in place to address the issues identified were outlined. It was confirmed that a Housing Tenant Satisfaction and Improvement Programme had been established, chaired by the Chief Executive, providing clear governance, delivery oversight, grip and accountability in respect of the required improvements. Members were further advised that resident scrutiny had been strengthened through the Housing Management Advisory Board, chaired by Dawn Martin. Several key areas of focus within housing management were highlighted. The first related to voids, where the backlog was reducing. The second concerned compliance, where improvements were being made although data systems continued to be stabilised, with supporting information technology systems forming part of the ongoing improvement work. The

third area was repairs, where significant improvement had been recorded since autumn 2025, although capacity remained tight. The final area related to complaints, where volumes continued to rise. It was stated that this reflected both service issues and increased resident awareness, with learning being embedded as part of the system. It was noted that void losses and arrears had a direct impact on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and that improved performance in these areas was essential, as had been reported to the Resources Scrutiny Committee in the previous week. In concluding the presentation, it was emphasised that the approach remained honest about current weaknesses, focused on residents, and underpinned by strong governance, accurate data and political and organisational leadership. The Chair thanked Councillor Donnelly-Jackson and Tom Cattermole for their presentation to the Committee and then moved on to invite members to ask questions in relation to the information presented, with the following being noted:

- As an initial query, members queried why data quality and reporting issues had been a recurring theme in the report and sought clarification on what action was being taken to resolve these issues holistically. In response, Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) noted that a comprehensive improvement project had been established to address these matters. Spencer Randolph (Director Housing Services) further added that the core challenge in housing management had been the historic use of systems that were not fit for purpose. It was stated that the principal system used within housing management was NEC, which was an industry standard system but had not received required investment over the previous 8 years. It was explained that attempts had been made to build a dynamic system over the NEC platform, but this had not integrated effectively with NEC despite significant investment. Members were advised that two further systems were also used within housing management. The first, True Compliance, supported compliance workstreams such as gas safety, fire safety and electrical safety. This system had been introduced approximately two and a half years previously but had not been implemented or used correctly. The second system, Lifespan, supported decency and housing condition management and worked satisfactorily but did not integrate with the other systems. It was reported that the NEC structure was now being rebuilt and would become the predominant housing management system. It would act as the single source of information, with True Compliance and Lifespan integrated within it to enable full data consolidation. Members heard that this project had been underway for approximately 6 months and that the first phase was expected to be introduced by May or June 2026. The overall programme was anticipated to take approximately 18 months. It was additionally mentioned that the Council managed approximately 12,500 council and leasehold properties. It was noted that some leaseholders did not reside in their properties and therefore additional addresses were required on the system, with an estimated total of between 20,000 and 25,000 addresses. It was reported that approximately 900,000 individual address related data had required cleansing within NEC. It was confirmed that the Council was nearing completion of the data cleansing process, particularly for True Compliance, with completion anticipated by May 2026. It was further

stated that validation of properties was ongoing and that officers were now confident that all properties requiring a fire risk assessment were recorded on the system. Contractors were undertaking outstanding assessments. Members were informed that the same validation processes were underway for gas, electrical safety, legionella and asbestos. It was emphasised that the scale of the project was considerable but essential, as the system established would be used to manage the housing stock for the next 20 years.

In noting the response received, members suggested that a full report be provided to the Committee on the operation of the housing management systems, setting out how the previously separate systems were being integrated into the rebuilt NEC system to ensure that all systems used within Housing Management were being brought together effectively.

- Details were sought on the reasons for the increase in disrepair cases. In response, Spencer Randolph (Director Housing Services) explained that repairs and maintenance related to day-to-day repair work, most of which was reactive. Disrepair, by contrast, concerned legal claims brought by tenants alleging that the Council had failed to undertake necessary repairs, often in relation to damp and mould. It was stated that there had not been a substantial increase in repair requests, with approximately 27,000 cases per year remaining typical. However, there had been an increase in completed repairs, largely due to the move from a single repairs contractor, Wates, to a dual contractor model. Since October, Mears had covered the east of the borough and Wates the west. Legacy repair cases resulting from the transition had been cleared, resulting in higher completion numbers. It was noted that the housing stock was ageing and that limited capital investment in recent years had contributed to increased repair needs. Work was underway to reestablish capital investment priorities based upon decency standards and identified need. It was highlighted that increased reporting of damp and mould reflected both evolving circumstances and improved resident awareness resulting from communications activity. It was emphasised that while some increase had occurred, the Council did not expect numbers to exceed the approximate 27,000 annual repair cases.

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) added that while legitimate disrepair claims should never be minimised, the Minister for Housing had issued a call for evidence in February 2026 regarding whether claims farming was contributing to rising national disrepair claims. Reference was made to the prevalence of no win no fee arrangements and referral fees. Members noted that the Council did not know the extent to which any local increase was attributable to claims farming, but that the issue was recognised nationally. It was reaffirmed that residents with legitimate claims should always be supported to bring them, particularly in the context of Awaab's Law.

Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) further added that increased regulatory expectations had arisen following Grenfell and Awaab's Law. Reference was made to section 11 of the committee report, which explained that complaints had increased due to

residents being encouraged to complain and having higher expectations of the complaints process.

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) additionally mentioned that complaints were essential in supporting service improvement. Reference was made to the recent deep dive review undertaken by Elizabeth Skillen (Quality Assurance and Standards Manager) and emphasised the importance of distinguishing between service requests and complaints, noting that these could sometimes become blurred. It was stated that the Council sought not to avoid complaints but to treat them appropriately so that learning could be embedded. It was emphasised that complaints should be acted upon promptly, resolved at the first possible point of contact, and handled in a respectful manner that placed tenants at the centre of service delivery. It was stressed that complaints were not the responsibility of Brent Housing alone, but required a whole Council approach, ensuring that any issue raised at any point of contact was captured and addressed.

- Members were keen to seek details on how complaints relating to antisocial behaviour were being addressed. In response, Spencer Randolph (Director Housing Services) highlighted that there had been some improvement in the perception of how antisocial behaviour was being managed. It was confirmed that officers were bringing forward a new Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy and were working across departments, including with the antisocial behaviour team, to consider how additional officer capacity could be funded to take a more proactive approach in relation to council housing. It was noted that antisocial behaviour constituted a significant proportion of the complaints received and included issues such as fly tipping, the dumping of rubbish and nuisance neighbours.

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) added that antisocial behaviour was an issue raised across various estates and that the Council listened carefully to those concerns. It was stated that improved coordination with the community safety team had been necessary, which had informed the development of the upcoming Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy. It was confirmed that the strategy would be subject to consultation, allowing tenants, leaseholders and other residents to contribute. Further reference was made to the Brent Joint Action Group (BJAG) meetings, where the police, Brent Housing Management, housing associations and other partners met directly to discuss approaches to addressing antisocial behaviour on estates. It was acknowledged that further improvement in this area was required.

- Co-opted members made reference to the detail provided on page 42 of the committee report which concerned satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling complaints. It was observed that only 24.6% of respondents appeared to be satisfied and members questioned whether further information was available to explain such a low figure. In response, Spencer Randolph (Director Housing Services) emphasised that the sector as a whole experienced low satisfaction levels in this area. It was acknowledged that Brent was in the lower quartile and accepted that improvement was required.

It was reported that improvements were being observed and that these were likely a result of measures introduced to strengthen complaint handling. It was noted that the Tenant Satisfaction Measures included perception-based questions and that it could be difficult to determine what residents were thinking when responding. It was confirmed that, in the most recent Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey, supplementary questions had been included to enable further analysis. The report from that exercise was awaited and would enable deeper understanding of the responses. It was added that local authorities performing better across the Tenant Satisfaction Measures often had newer housing stock or more established engagement approaches. It was further explained that the questions were prescribed and asked in a standard format, but that the additional supplementary questions would help officers identify areas requiring improvement.

- Co-opted members then referred to paragraph 6.20 within the committee report and questioned how many staff were within the temporary lettings team. In response, Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) indicated that the team consisted of 4 staff members.
- Following on from the previous question, co-opted members further asked whether financial or regulatory constraints were preventing an increase in staffing, noting that the team would likely be required to undertake additional deployments. In response, Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) stated that as tenants moved into new build properties, the Council received additional rental income and increased council tax, which supported the service. It was explained that the pressure placed on the new team of area tenancy managers, when combined with the introduction of 892 new build properties within the year, had been significant. It had therefore been necessary to introduce temporary resourcing to support the increased workload.
- Representatives of the Brent Youth Parliament referred to new legislation arising from Awaab's Law and noted that a significant proportion of Brent residents did not have English as their first language. The representatives highlighted that opportunities for parents to access learning spaces had reduced since the Covid period and questioned what steps the Council was taking to ensure that migrant communities were fully informed of their enhanced rights and of the risks associated with substandard housing. In response, Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) confirmed that the Council was fully committed to ensuring that information was accessible. The Committee heard that all published communications could be translated online using the Council's translation tool. It was also noted that the contact centre included staff who could speak many of the approximately 100 languages represented in Brent. It was added that area tenancy management teams were also multilingual. Reference was additionally made to Brent Hubs, which formed part of resident services, and it was noted that many residents used the hubs as a first point of contact, where staff held a diverse range of language and advice skills.

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) additionally mentioned that in addition to multilingual staff, officers frequently used tools such as Google Translate and that translation support was also available through the DA Languages service. The importance of ensuring that residents received information in the languages most useful to them was emphasised.

Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) further added that many partners within the hub network and the housing team worked with community organisations such as SAAFI and organisations representing Portuguese, Brazilian and Romanian communities. These organisations regularly advocated on behalf of tenants.

- Further details were sought on how repair performance had improved over the last 2 years. Members also raised concerns regarding new build properties and referred to complaints relating to Roy Smith Court concerning the entry door system, refuse chutes and access to the car park. On the South Kilburn Estate, there had been complaints about dumping and, more recently, a boiler breakdown. It was questioned whether contractors responsible for constructing the properties were required to rectify such issues or whether the costs fell to the Council. In response, Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) noted that both Mears and Wates had attended the Housing Management Advisory Board, which included tenant representatives, to present their performance. It was stated that the Council was scrutinising the contracts closely and that tenants had provided direct and candid feedback. It was confirmed that the Council was ensuring that contractors were fully accountable for repairs.

Spencer Randolph (Director Housing Services) further added that improvements in repairs performance could be attributed to the introduction of the new contractors and stronger contract management arrangements. It was noted that the presence of two contractors had created a degree of competition which had been beneficial. It was further reported that additional officer capacity had been introduced, enabling more inspections and verification of completed works. With regard to new builds, it was explained that issues were addressed within the defect liability period and the latent defect period, during which the Council could refer matters back to the main contractor if faults were attributable to installation or construction matters. It was noted that properties cited had not been built by the Council but had been procured during construction, after specifications had already been agreed. Where faults occurred, the Council sought to manage and resolve them as quickly as possible for residents.

- Clarification was sought on who was responsible for costs associated with decanting residents into temporary accommodation where defects occurred. In response, Spencer Randolph (Director Housing Services) advised that responsibility depended on the cause of the defect. Where defects were attributable to the main contractor, the Council would seek to recover costs. It was confirmed that there had been very few instances requiring decant as a result of new build defects. It was noted that issues such as breakdowns in

central heating systems could have large impacts where a central system served a large number of flats.

- Questions were raised around the financial impact of void properties, including the effect on lost rent and council tax liability, and members sought clarification on whether sufficient resources were being dedicated to addressing the issue of voids. In response, Spencer Randolph (Director Housing Services) explained that the void loss rate was approximately 4%, and that the service aimed to reduce this to approximately 2.5% by the end of the following year. It was stated that a significant programme of work had been undertaken to return void properties to use. A new team had been established, comprising 5 officers dedicated to void management and bringing properties back into use. It was confirmed that 2 contractors, Wates and a second contractor named Greyline, had been appointed specifically to undertake void works. Members were advised that approximately £5 million was expected to be spent during the current year on returning void properties back into use. It was stated that although progress had been made, officers continued to work through a legacy of longstanding voids. It was explained that returning those older voids, which required more extensive work, had negatively affected the average void turnaround time, despite the underlying improvement in performance. It was confirmed that the investment being made was substantial and that the service was focused on reducing void times in order to limit rent loss.

Councillor Donnelly Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) further added that when residents were moved from overcrowded or unsuitable accommodation into new build homes, properties were freed up behind them. Those vacated homes often required work before they could be relet. It was stated that although this created temporary voids, it was a positive outcome because families were moving into homes that better met their needs. Satisfaction was expressed that performance data indicated that the new team was on track, that performance was improving and that progress was moving in the right direction.

- Further questions were raised by members on whether the service had set a target for the void rate and turnaround time. In response, Spencer Randolph (Director Housing Services) noted that officers sought to reach a position by the summer in which almost all legacy voids had been returned to use. Members noted that a small number of legacy voids might remain due to the extensive works required, for example in cases involving subsidence or fire damage. It was stated that by the summer, the service intended to be dealing only with day-to-day voids arising from routine circumstances such as tenant moves, deaths or transfers, each of which required void works before the property could be relet.

Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) added that the financial impact of voids included lost rental income, council tax charges and increased spending on temporary accommodation. It was stated that officers would provide the Committee with the relevant figures, following the meeting.

Councillor Donnelly Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) further advised the Committee that, based on current performance taken from the Full Council budget, voids represented 5.07% of social and formula rent properties, resulting in an estimated rental income loss of approximately £3 million in the financial year 2025 to 2026. It was noted that peer authorities reported a median void loss rate of 2.2% and that a 1% reduction in void losses would generate approximately £0.6 million in additional annual income.

- Queries were raised on whether there was a proactive strategy to undertake planned repairs so as to minimise the likelihood of repairs escalating into larger issues. In response, Spencer Randolph (Director Housing Services) highlighted that historically the Council had not undertaken sufficient planned works. It was stated that provisional work had been carried out and that a strategy was being developed focusing on disrepair and decency. It was explained that the intention was to undertake proactive renewal of kitchens, heating systems and bathrooms once they reached a certain age, rather than waiting for failures. It was reported that the strategy was expected to be completed within the next 2 months and would inform the programme of planned works for the forthcoming year. Members were advised that approximately £16 million had been set aside for capital works during the next year. It was further reported that when the Council had referred itself to the Regulator, a key criticism had been the lack of comprehensive stock condition information. At that time decency levels of approximately 92% were being reported, although this figure had been based on only 40% of the stock having been surveyed within a five-year period. It was confirmed that the survey programme had been accelerated and that by the end of the financial year 70% of properties would have been surveyed. By the same time the following year 100% of properties would have undergone stock condition surveys. It was stated that the survey data would feed into the housing management systems, enabling accurate planning of maintenance and investment. It was confirmed that despite the significant increase in surveys undertaken, decency levels remained approximately 92% but without investment these levels would decline.
- Members sought clarification regarding voids arising from the allocation of new build homes. It was observed that although the Council had a long housing waiting list, some new build homes were being allocated to existing tenants, resulting in additional voids requiring turnaround work. It was questioned why new applicants were not being placed directly into new builds in order to avoid additional voids. Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) responded that the majority of residents moving into new build properties were coming from temporary accommodation.

Spencer Randolph (Director Housing Services) further mentioned that allocation of new build properties occurred through several mechanisms including direct offers, choice based lettings through Locata and transfers from overcrowded properties. It was emphasised that not all new build

allocations resulted in a vacated property but that a proportion did contribute to the void figures.

- Members observed that it was concerning that the process could result in the creation of additional voids at a time of significant housing need. In response, Councillor Donnelly Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) referred to paragraph 6.3 of the committee report, which described short term increases in void numbers as a result of the handover of 450 new homes. There was felt to be a need to see a more frictionless process, including earlier preparation for subsequent allocations when families moved into new build properties. It was noted that although voids were sometimes extended because applicants declined properties following viewings, choice remained a necessary part of the process. It was further mentioned that improving the efficiency of the process remained a priority.

Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) further added that approximately 70% of new builds were allocated to homeless households in temporary accommodation, 20% were allocated to transfer cases and 10% were allocated through the Homeseekers Private Rented Sector route.

- Representatives of the BYP referred to paragraph 12.9 of the committee report which indicated that Copilot AI was being used to support new recruits. The representatives questioned what environmental considerations had been taken into account in relation to the increased use of AI. In response, Councillor Donnelly Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) highlighted that AI had considerable potential to support public services. It was stated that the question of the environmental impacts such as water usage in data centres was an issue requiring consideration at national level. It was further explained that AI represented a whole Council approach rather than an issue specific to housing management. It was acknowledged that although AI had been referenced within housing reports, environmental considerations were a broader Council matter.

In seeking to bring consideration of the item to a close, the Chair thanked officers and members for their contributions towards scrutiny of the Housing Management: Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Brent Housing Management (BHM) Performance Report. As a result of the outcome of the discussion, the following recommendations and information requests identified were AGREED:

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- That a full report be provided to the Committee on housing management systems, including a clear plan setting out how these are being integrated into the new NEC suite ensuring all systems used within Housing Management for gas safety, fire safety, electrical safety, housing decency and wider housing condition systems are being brought together effectively.

- That the development of a Repairs Preventative Strategy be explored and formalised.

## **INFORMATION REQUESTS**

- That data be provided on the financial impact of void properties, including an assessment of rent arrears associated with void periods, income lost through missed rental collection, and any council tax liabilities arising during the vacancy of properties.
- That information be provided on key performance indicators, benchmarked against performance measures from other London borough

### **8. Area Tenancy Management Model**

Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) was invited to introduce the Area Tenancy Management Model Report. In presenting, it was highlighted that Shanice Low (Area Tenancy Manager) and Georgia Gallagher (Area Tenancy Manager) were two of the Council's area tenancy managers, covering the areas from Willesden to Kensal Green and Kilburn. It was outlined that the area tenancy management model had been introduced in June 2024 in response to fragmentation between teams, weak handover processes, data quality issues and limited continuity in resident relationships. It was explained that the new model consolidated responsibilities into a single accountable role. Each Area Tenancy Manager, referred to as an ATM, was responsible for lettings, income collection, tenancy management, estate presence, early intervention and safeguarding from end to end. Members noted that the model remained relatively new and that recruitment and induction had taken time to complete. However, early evidence of positive impact was being observed, including increased tenancy audits, improved estate visibility and strengthened income performance during late 2025.

In presenting to the Committee on her role and the nature of cases she managed, Shanice Low (Area Tenancy Manager) informed the Committee that she had extensive experience within the Council. Prior to the restructure, she had worked solely as an income officer, focusing primarily on rent collection. Following the restructure, her role now encompassed income, tenancy management, lettings and acting as the first point of contact for prospective tenants. She reported that, upon taking up her new role, she had sent an introductory letter to every household within her management to inform residents of her role and provide her contact details. She then provided an example of a case relating to a resident referred to as Miss B, who was a management transfer moving from one area to another. She described how she had attempted to contact Miss B by email and telephone to arrange a viewing but had initially been unable to reach her. She subsequently received a response from Miss B's support worker advising that Miss B had significant vulnerabilities.

She explained that, after two cancelled viewings due to Miss B being hospitalised, Miss B eventually attended a viewing and expressed interest in the property but requested the installation of a wet room. Shanice Low (Area Tenancy Manager) contacted the occupational therapy team, who carried out an assessment and agreed to make the necessary adaptations. The sign up was coordinated and Miss B attended with her mother and support worker. Shanice Low advised that, because Miss B was hospitalised again following the sign up, she was unable to return the keys for her former property for approximately 6 weeks. As a result, Miss B incurred rent and council tax liabilities at both properties. Shanice Low explained that because she had established a relationship with Miss B's support worker, she had been able to coordinate communication and support arrangements to minimise the impact. She described how she had suggested a dual Discretionary Housing Payment application to assist Miss B in covering the rental charges associated with one of the properties. She further reported ongoing liaison with the allocations team to ensure that Miss B's interest in the property was understood despite her vulnerabilities and repeated cancellations. She also maintained contact with the occupational therapy team to confirm when the adaptations could be completed after the system was updated to show that Miss B had moved in. In concluding her presentation to the Committee, Shanice Low highlighted that her knowledge of Miss B's vulnerabilities enabled her to take a holistic approach to the tenancy, ensuring that issues related to lettings, rent and support needs were understood together. It was explained that without this integrated approach, the missed viewings or rent arrears might otherwise have been misinterpreted as a lack of engagement or non-payment rather than as consequences of Miss B's health and vulnerabilities.

In continuing the presentation to the Committee, Georgia Gallagher (Area Tenancy Manager) noted that she had joined the Council after the restructure in December 2024. She reported that she, too, had issued introductory letters to all residents within her management, setting out her role and contact details. She explained that she managed a high-rise block in Kilburn and had received a significant number of antisocial behaviour complaints relating to a particular property. Following inspections and checks, she discovered that the resident of that property was vulnerable and was a victim of cuckooing, whereby individuals involved in county lines activities took over the homes of vulnerable residents. She stated that she had submitted a safeguarding referral and worked closely with the antisocial behaviour team and the police. She undertook joint visits to the property with the police and social services and discussed the possibility of a management move. However, due to the level of community support the resident received from a neighbour, a move was considered inappropriate at that time. She therefore explored alternative safeguarding measures, including the use of closure orders. She explained that the block had wider issues including abandoned and vandalised vehicles and graffiti. Over the course of the year, she worked jointly with the repairs team, the compliance team and Vehicle Estate Services to address these issues. She sought 2 partial

closure orders: one to safeguard the vulnerable resident by providing police with enhanced powers of arrest in the event of unauthorised entry by non-tenants, and another to address the behaviour of a second tenant whose actions were contributing to the antisocial behaviour within the block. She informed the Committee that she had received excellent feedback from residents during the 3-month period in which the closure orders were in place. The closure orders had created a period of respite which enabled contractors to improve security measures, remove graffiti, and remove abandoned vehicles. She also reported that estate walkabouts had identified additional measures to prevent future antisocial behaviour. In concluding her presentation to the Committee, Georgia Gallagher highlighted that the work she had described had taken approximately one year and that she would next be focusing on engaging residents across the entire block through engagement events and other initiatives.

The Chair thanked Tom Cattermole, Shanice Low and Georgia Gallagher for their presentation to the Committee and then moved on to invite members to ask questions in relation to the information presented, with the following being noted:

- Members reported, specifically in relation to Clearwater House, that based on feedback received at a recent meeting, residents had raised concerns that complaints were not being responded to and that their housing point of contact within Brent Council appeared to change repeatedly. Residents felt that responsibility for their issues was being passed between different teams without accountability. It was stated that the information provided to residents when moving in, setting out who to contact for different matters, had been described as unhelpful. Members queried whether officers were aware of these concerns and what steps were being taken to address them. In addressing the issues highlighted, Councillor Donnelly Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) noted that a new case management tool had been implemented to support better identification and monitoring of learning from complaints. Members were advised that a full review of complaints handling had been launched in October 2024. With regard to Clearwater House specifically, officers undertook to examine the matter further. It was explained that, for some new build schemes, residents had been provided with guidance packs and that area tenancy managers had held meetings with residents, supported by other staff, to explain processes.

Kate Daine (Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods) confirmed awareness of issues at Clearwater House and explained that some difficulties had arisen across new build blocks where approximately 700 properties had been let. It was noted that many of the new build blocks were mixed tenure and involved mixed management arrangements, which made issues more complex and required officers to adapt as the service developed its approach. Kate Daine accepted the feedback provided and undertook to progress the matter

following the meeting. It was stated that officers would ensure that communication improved, that residents were clear about their points of contact and that complaint escalation routes were properly understood and responded to.

- Details were sought on whether the Council, together with the police, used any form of Section 7 eviction notice for individuals who should not be residing in properties. In response, Georgia Gallagher (Area Tenancy Manager) highlighted that, in broader situations involving closure orders, a full closure order could be sought. It was explained that when a full closure order was granted, the property was closed and all individuals were required to vacate, with the tenant being decanted elsewhere temporarily. This could then lead to eviction where the tenant was responsible for serious antisocial behaviour, or to safeguarding interventions where the tenant was vulnerable. It was noted that closure orders could be used where individuals engaging in antisocial behaviour were accessing the property, and that closure orders provided a faster means of regaining control of a property pending possession proceedings.
- Members sought clarification on how long a property remained closed when a closure order was in place. In response, Spencer Randolph (Director Housing Services) indicated that where a partial closure order was issued, the tenant could remain in occupation but named individuals or any other persons who were causing issues were prohibited from entering. Any breach of the order could result in arrest and prosecution. In the case of a full closure order, the order normally lasted between 3 and 6 months. A further closure order could be applied for if required. It was emphasised that closure orders were interim measures, aimed at stabilising the situation and protecting residents. It was noted that tenants retained their tenancy during the closure order period, but if the tenant had been responsible for antisocial behaviour, the period could be used to progress ending the tenancy. It was clarified that the property could not be relet while the closure order remained in place.
- Members questioned whether the police were still utilising Section 7 eviction notices for individuals who should not be residing in properties. In response, Kate Daine (Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods) highlighted that the Council worked closely with Legal Services and the Community Protection Service to ensure that the most effective and timely legal route was taken in each case. It was further stated that public sector equality duty assessments were undertaken to ensure that any action taken was appropriate for vulnerable residents. It was emphasised that the Council always sought the most suitable and proportionate option for the resident affected.

- In noting that the current debt position was over £7 million and significantly above that of most London boroughs, members questioned what actions were being taken to address the issue. In response, Kate Daine (Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods) highlighted that the area tenancy managers, including Shanice Low (Area Tenancy Manager) and Georgia Gallagher (Area Tenancy Manager), had achieved excellent performance in respect of Patches rates, both achieving rates of 100%. It was stated that the next priority was to substantially improve debt collection. It was confirmed that a small team of 4 temporary staff was being recruited. Members noted that the first phase of the NEC remediation project was focused on rent collection and data improvement, and that officers anticipated improved performance in the next financial year as this work progressed.
- Members queried the effectiveness of estate walkabouts in achieving tangible improvements and shared learning. In response, Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) emphasised that estate walkabouts had been highly effective. It was expressed that he had gained significant insight from attending walkabouts with councillors and with staff on the ground. It was noted that residents engaged openly and readily, raising concerns and also complimenting their area tenancy managers.
- Further clarification was sought on what mechanisms were in place to ensure that issues identified during walkabouts were followed up, resolved and communicated back to tenants. In response, Kate Daine (Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods) shared with the Committee that improvements had been made following the appointment of new technical officers within Property Services. Previously, officers had struggled to coordinate estate level repairs and maintenance. It was stated that Property Services now attended almost all walkabouts and were able to log repairs immediately. It was confirmed that action plans were in place for each estate and that Property Services now held responsibility for progressing repairs and providing meaningful updates before the next walkabout. It was further highlighted that tangible improvements were beginning to be seen.
- Co-opted members expressed that they were pleased to hear the personal relationships described by officers and by the letters sent to residents, which were perceived as approachable. A question was then posed to officers on what single issue tenants most often raised based on officers' experience on the ground. In response, Georgia Gallagher (Area Tenancy Manager) shared that, when beginning her role, many residents had not seen an officer for a long period of time. It was explained that residents often experienced frustration when using the contact centre and welcomed in-person contact. It was noted that tenants did not always feel heard. It was also explained that

area tenancy managers often acted as a point of contact between different departments and that tenants sometimes assumed responsibility lay solely with the Area Tenancy Manager. Georgia Gallagher reported that her repairs were being completed more quickly and that escalation through area tenancy managers had enabled fast tracking of some cases.

Shanice Low (Area Tenancy Manager) further added that previously many complaints related to residents not knowing who their housing officer was, as well as complaints about repairs. It was highlighted that clarity around points of contact had improved, though repairs continued to account for a significant proportion of complaints.

- A Member recognised the value of estate walkabouts and of the engagement they facilitated but questioned how walkabouts were planned and scheduled. The Member noted that they had received invitations for some estates within their ward but not others, and that walkabouts were sometimes scheduled without checking availability. The Member additionally questioned whether, after one year of operation, the number and size of Patches managed by area tenancy managers remained appropriate. In response, Kate Daine (Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods) assured the Member that she would review the scheduling arrangements. It was explained that walkabouts were placed in diaries and relevant councillors were invited but acknowledged that adjustments might be required for estates with only a small number of street properties. She invited the Member to contact her regarding specific areas. It was additionally stated that the Council attempted to reschedule walkabouts where councillors could not attend. It was further explained that Patches were designed based on geography, levels of antisocial behaviour, rental arrears, turnover of properties and other factors. It was acknowledged that the role of Area Tenancy Manager was busy and reactive but emphasised that processes would become easier as improvements continued across policies, repairs and systems. It was confirmed that Patch sizes remained under review.

In seeking to bring consideration of the item to a close, the Chair thanked officers and members for their contributions towards scrutiny of the Area Tenancy Management Model Report. As a result of the outcome of the discussion, the following recommendation was AGREED:

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- That communications with residents at Clearwater House be improved with clear updates and to inform them with details of an accountable point of contact be following resident complaints that they were not receiving responses, that their housing point of contact changed repeatedly, and that cases were passed between teams without clear accountability.

## **9. Temporary Accommodation, Supported Exempt Accommodation and Homelessness Prevention**

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) was invited to introduce the Temporary Accommodation, Supported Exempt Accommodation and Homelessness Prevention Report. In presenting, it was stated that the report had been presented against the backdrop of a severe housing crisis. Members were advised that the Council had experienced a 21% increase in homelessness presentations, with cases expected to reach just under 9,000 by the end of the 2025 to 2026 financial year. It was further reported that the number of households placed in temporary accommodation had risen. It was emphasised that a significant amount of work was being undertaken in this area.

In continuing the presentation to the Committee, Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) added that the direction of travel within this important area of work was focused on reducing reliance on nightly paid placements, which were the most expensive form of temporary accommodation, and securing more stable accommodation for residents. It was stated that efforts were also directed towards strengthening quality assurance processes. It was highlighted that the Council was required to balance its statutory duties, the wellbeing of residents and the financial sustainability of the local authority.

The Chair thanked Councillor Donnelly-Jackson and Tom Cattermole for their presentation to the Committee and then moved on to invite members to ask questions in relation to the information presented, with the following being noted:

- Representatives of the Brent Youth Parliament began by questioning whether more specific data was available on the age profile of those placed in temporary accommodation. The representatives noted that the age range of 0 to 17 years was broad, encompassing a wide range of different needs and issues, and asked whether a more granular breakdown existed. In response, Laurence Coaker (Director Housing Needs and Support) indicated that a full breakdown of age groups was available and that officers were able to break down the age range in any form required.
- As a further issue highlighted, the Brent Youth Parliament representatives further stated that young people were particularly vulnerable, as referenced in paragraph 9.3 of the committee report and expressed concern that the report lacked clear actions regarding how young people could be safeguarded while living in temporary accommodation. It was noted that family wellbeing centres and Brent Hubs had been referenced as sources of support for families with young children. However, the representatives highlighted that a significant proportion of households were being placed

outside the borough or beyond the M25, raising concerns about whether comparable support was available for those placed at a distance from Brent. In response, Komal Samra (Head of Accommodation Services) highlighted that officers were working closely with colleagues across multiple service areas. An example was provided relating to public health, noting that regular visits were being arranged to temporary accommodation sites such as Anansi House and Knowles House. These visits were intended to ensure that young applicants received wraparound support and were signposted to relevant health services. The importance of face-to-face contact to avoid residents having to rely solely on email or contact centre channels to access holistic support was also emphasised.

- Following on from the previous question, the Brent Youth Parliament representatives queried what measures were in place to ensure that households placed at considerable distances, including locations such as Hartlepool, received equivalent support. The representatives highlighted that families placed far from Brent often faced barriers to education and that parents who did not speak English as a first language were likely to face additional difficulties accessing support services. In response, Tom Cattermole (Corporate Director Residents and Housing Services) highlighted that any resident, regardless of whether they lived within the borough, was able to access Brent Community Hubs. It was confirmed that residents placed outside the borough could contact the hub support service by telephone and access the full range of assistance provided by the hubs.

Komal Samra (Head of Accommodation Services) further added that when the Council placed a young person outside the borough, it had a duty to notify the receiving local authority. This ensured that the receiving authority was aware of the placement and that any relevant vulnerabilities could be addressed through appropriate service links. It was stated that significant work was underway to identify individuals who should not have been placed out of the borough and to prioritise moving them back into the borough or into more suitable locations.

- Representatives of the Brent Youth Parliament were also keen to seek details on whether the Council intended to incorporate examinations and key educational milestones into its placement framework. In response, Komal Samra (Head of Accommodation Services) noted that the Council's temporary accommodation placements policy, which was published online, required the Council to avoid placing young people sitting examinations at a considerable distance from the borough and ensured that placements remained within an acceptable travel distance. It was acknowledged that there were occasions when families remained in out of borough placements

for longer than intended. In such cases, the Council maintained a priority list to facilitate moves back into the borough or into closer locations. It was stated that the forthcoming supply of new leased temporary accommodation would assist in reducing these pressures.

- Members cited paragraph 4.1.5 of the committee report, which stated that the Council wished to undertake further work with institutional investors to secure long term low cost leased accommodation and requested an update on progress, the reasons for delays and what more could be done to accelerate this work. In response, Laurence Coaker (Director Housing Needs and Support) noted that a report would be presented to Cabinet in April 2026 and advised that the Council had identified four or five providers with a pipeline totalling approximately 360 suitable units for potential inclusion in long term leases of ten years or more. It was explained that progress had been slow because of the risks involved. Providers typically sought leases of over forty years and required index linked rent increases. The Council's income, however, was tied to the Local Housing Allowance, which did not rise annually and could remain frozen for several years. The Corporate Director Finance and Resources had therefore been clear that the Council could not enter into forty-year leases or index linked arrangements, as these would create long term financial pressures. It was reported that there had been a recent shift in the market. The Council had engaged Greenlight Commercial and Consulting to provide expertise in evaluating proposals, identifying credible providers and developing a shortlist to be presented to Cabinet in April 2026.
- Members referred to recent media reports involving a private landlord who had evicted tenants in order to relet the properties to a council as temporary accommodation. Assurance was sought that Brent Council would not enter into arrangements with such providers. In response, Laurence Coaker (Director Housing Needs and Support) assured the Committee that the Council would not knowingly enter into any arrangement with providers engaging in such practices. It was stated that many institutional investors were large pension funds seeking stable returns and that their business models were based on responsible investment. An example was provided in relation to Civic Nest, which worked constructively with Ealing Council to support residents to move on from temporary accommodation. It was further stated that Greenlight had extensive knowledge of the sector and was able to identify reputable providers and exclude those seeking to exploit the housing crisis.
- Members reported concerns that residents had raised regarding being in temporary accommodation for extended periods, including cases of

households remaining in such accommodation for 20 years. It was stated that some families were living in unsuitable conditions, including shared facilities, and children faced difficulties travelling to school when placed outside the borough. Questions were raised on how the Council addressed such cases. In response, Laurence Coaker (Director Housing Needs and Support) emphasised that the Council no longer had families living in shared accommodation or bed and breakfast accommodation. It was reported that during the summer the Council had approximately 20 households living in shared accommodation or bed and breakfast accommodation, but that this number had now reduced to 1, with the remaining family having accepted an offer of social housing pending resolution of a minor issue. It was stated that the new supply of leased accommodation, expected to begin arriving from September 2026, would assist significantly. The duty to notify receiving authorities when placements were made outside the borough was reiterated and it was stated that the Council continued intensive work to identify families who should be moved back into Brent or into more suitable locations. The risks associated with families remaining in leased accommodation for many years and not bidding on Locata properties because they were waiting for an ideal property which rarely became available were highlighted. It was emphasised that the Council encouraged all households in temporary accommodation to bid proactively.

- Members queried why empty void properties could not be used as temporary accommodation. In response, Laurence Coaker (Director Housing Needs and Support) explained that void properties could not be used because they required extensive repairs and would take many months to bring up to a habitable standard.
- Supplementary queries were raised regarding what mechanisms were in place to ensure that temporary accommodation was suitable and appropriate for residents. In response, Laurence Coaker (Director Housing Needs and Support) noted that approximately 60% of families were in nightly paid temporary accommodation, with the remainder in longer term leased accommodation. It was further noted that long term leased accommodation tended to be of higher quality. Where disrepair arose in leased accommodation, the Council's officers or housing providers, depending on the lease scheme in question, were responsible for resolution. It was stated that the most significant challenges were within nightly paid accommodation. Brent participated in the Setting the Standard pan London inspection regime, under which London council officers inspected and graded properties. It was added that the Council retained the ability to decant residents and refuse further use of particular providers until issues were addressed.

- Views were sought on how confident officers were that the Council was not applying a one size fits all approach to applicants. In response, Laurence Coaker (Director Housing Needs and Support) expressed that the Council operated within the statutory framework, which required accommodation offers to be suitable. It was stated that no two families were the same and that officers considered each household's circumstances, including support needs, vulnerabilities and mobility requirements. Affordability was also a significant factor.
- Councillor Donnelly Jackson (Cabinet Member for Housing) additionally noted that legislation required the Council to produce a personalised housing plan for each homeless applicant. It was reported that the Council had commissioned Bridges Outcomes Partnerships to examine temporary accommodation suitability for neurodiverse children. It was stated that suitability continued to be challenged and scrutinised and that the ongoing work to improve outcomes for vulnerable households was welcomed.

In seeking to bring consideration of the item to a close, the Chair thanked officers and members for their contributions towards scrutiny of the Temporary Accommodation, Supported Exempt Accommodation and Homelessness Prevention Report. As a result of the outcome of the discussion, the following information request was identified and AGREED:

### **INFORMATION REQUESTS**

- That further data be provided to the Committee and Brent Youth Parliament setting out a more detailed breakdown of temporary accommodation figures by age group, as members of the Brent Youth Parliament noted that the current category encompassing all individuals aged 0 to 17 years was too broad and did not sufficiently distinguish between the differing needs and issues affecting children and young people within that wide age range.

#### **10. Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2025-26**

Having reviewed the work programme report, it was RESOLVED to note the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

#### **11. Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee Recommendations Tracker**

Having reviewed the Scrutiny Committee Recommendations Tracker, it was RESOLVED to note the progress of the previous recommendations, suggestions for improvement, and information requests of the Committee.

#### **12. Exclusion of the Press and Public**

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

**13. Any other urgent business**

No items of urgent business were identified.

The meeting closed at 8pm.

COUNCILLOR KETAN SHETH  
Chair