Brent

Item 7.1: Questions from Members of the Public

Full Council – 14 September 2026

1. **Question from Stephen Thomas to Councillor Liz Dixon (Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Public Health)**

Can the Cabinet Member advise what the Council is doing to address the inconsiderate and dangerous use of e-bikes, scooters and pedal bikes across the Alperton area by individuals often riding at great speed and with no helmets or lights, both on and off the pavements and with other riders as passengers. The use of these bikes and scooters in this way is a significant safety concern for other road users and pedestrians alike. Will the Council therefore consider undertaking a period of targeted enforcement action to address the safety concerns outlined, including the confiscation of illegal bikes and scooters to set an example to other users.

Response:

The Council recognises residents' concerns regarding the dangerous and inconsiderate use of e-bikes, scooters and other vehicles in the Alperton area, particularly where they are ridden at excessive speeds, on pavements, without appropriate lighting or safety equipment, or in a manner that places pedestrians and other road users at risk.

As an immediate step, the concerns raised in Alperton will be referred to the next Brent Joint Action Group meeting. This multi-agency forum, chaired by the local Neighbourhood Police Inspector, brings together key partners to coordinate responses to community safety issues. Through this partnership approach, we will seek to develop targeted enforcement activity focused on dangerous vehicle use and breaches of the borough's Nuisance Vehicles Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO).

Alongside this, the Council will engage with local businesses and commercial premises in the Alperton area to raise awareness of the current PSPO requirements and encourage their support in reducing vehicle-related anti-social behaviour and improving compliance.

In addition, last year the Leader of Brent Council wrote to all major food delivery platforms operating in the borough, raising concerns about rider behaviour and public safety and calling on companies to establish and enforce clear rider codes of conduct aligned with the Highway Code, alongside stronger measures to improve compliance and accountability.

Looking beyond these immediate actions, the Council has commenced a review of the borough's Nuisance Vehicle PSPO. This forms part of a medium to long-term programme of work to assess the effectiveness of the current arrangements, identify opportunities to strengthen enforcement and consider whether additional measures may be required to respond to emerging issues, including the increasing use of e-bikes and scooters.

The review is being undertaken against a backdrop of reduced police resources and the disbandment of the Roads and Transport Policing Command's Roads and Transport Enforcement Team. This has affected enforcement capacity such as challenges relating to cloned registration plates, which can make the identification and prosecution of vehicle-related offences more difficult.

Whilst powers to seize illegal e-bikes, scooters and vehicles primarily rest with the Metropolitan Police Service, the Council will continue to work closely with police colleagues and other partners to identify enforcement opportunities, support targeted operations and improve safety for residents and visitors. Through both immediate partnership activity and the longer-term review of the PSPO framework, the Council remains committed to addressing dangerous and anti-social vehicle use across Alperton and the wider borough.

2. **Question from Sushil Rapatwar to Councillor Gwen Grahl (Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member Finance & Resources)**

Brent's council tax arrears reached £85.3 million at the end of 2024/25 — the highest of any London borough. Over the same period, enforcement agent (bailiff) return rates fell to 16.8%, and the council's unallocated reserves are forecast to fall to £7.5 million, with a risk of depletion by 2027/28.

Can the Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources confirm these figures and set out the specific plan and timetable to reduce Brent's council tax arrears, which are the highest in London?

Response:

Council Tax Arrears

Brent's historic council tax debt stood at £84.3m as at 1 April 2025. During 2025/26, the Council reduced historic arrears by £13.1m, lowering the balance from £84.3m to £71.2m. However, £21.7m of uncollected 2025/26 council tax liability was carried forward into 2026/27. As a result, total council tax debt at 1 April 2026 increased to £92.9m.

The Council does not recognise the 16.8% enforcement agent return rate referred to in the question. During 2025/26 Brent utilised four enforcement agent suppliers and monitored performance across all providers. The average collection rate achieved was 22.3%, which exceeds the commonly cited sector average of 20% for enforcement agent recovery activity. The Council continues to monitor enforcement activity closely to ensure recovery action remains effective, proportionate and represents value for money, while balancing the need to maximise collection rates with appropriate support for vulnerable residents.

Taking into account the 4.99% Council Tax increase for 2026/27, the 2026/27 collection target of 93.5% represents an increase in the value of income to be collected during the year.

In relation to the Council's plans to reduce council tax arrears, the Council has implemented a performance improvement programme to strengthen collection performance and reduce outstanding debt.

Key actions include:

- Targeted focus on segmented arrears with increased use of automated technologies facilitating text message, email and outbound telephone contact campaigns, which have already contributed to a £3.4m reduction in debt from 1 April 2026.

- Establishment of a dedicated six-month Council Tax Engagement & Recovery Team focused on early intervention, payment arrangements, increasing Direct Debit take-up and identifying vulnerable residents for support.

- A data-cleansing exercise to obtain missing email and mobile contact details for approximately 27,000 customers, enabling more effective engagement and recovery activity.

- Increased use of charging orders, repayment plans and targeted recovery action against higher-value debtors, with charging orders to the value of £3.5m secured.

- Further automation of recovery processes, including the introduction of AI-enabled statement generation and exploration of enhanced case management systems.

- Ongoing support for residents facing genuine financial hardship through the Council Tax Hardship Fund, which provided 13,154 awards worth £1.5m during 2025/26.

The improvement plan is focused on delivering service improvements throughout 2026/27, during which performance will be closely monitored to ensure collection levels remain on target. The increased in-year Council Tax collection target of 93.5% is expected to generate approximately £2.5 million in additional income compared with the previous year's target.

The Improvement Programme has established a stronger foundation for delivery through enhanced governance and performance management arrangements, the introduction of repeatable recovery campaigns and earlier interventions, improved debt segmentation and targeted recovery strategies, and a greater focus on reducing avoidable customer contact while increasing the use of automated payment methods and self-service channels.

The service will prioritise performance to ensure collection remains on trajectory. Early warning indicators will be monitored closely, with escalation routes and targeted recovery campaigns deployed promptly where emerging risks are identified. This approach will also include the early monitoring of applications and uptake of the Council Tax Hardship Fund to ensure support is targeted appropriately while maintaining collection performance.

Progress will be monitored through monthly Income and Debt Board meetings, operational performance reviews, and regular reporting to senior management and members. While council tax debt remains a significant challenge, the initiatives commenced in 2025/26 and continued throughout 2026/27 demonstrates that reductions in historic debt balances are achievable with sufficient resources, governance and performance monitoring in place.

Reserves

At the end of 2025/26, the Council held £24.3m of unallocated reserves (reserves that are not earmarked for a specific purpose). Of this, £20.7m is the General Fund Balance, the Section 151 officer’s assessment of the adequate level of reserves required to maintain the Council’s financial sustainability. At Quarter 1 in 2026/27, the

Council was reporting a forecast overspend of £9.5m. If left unmitigated, this would result in a reduction of the unallocated reserves to £14.8m at the end of 2026/27. However, the Council is taking a number of mitigating actions, including continuing to implement spending controls and a further update will be provided to Cabinet in the Quarter 2 Financial Forecast report in October.

As stated in the Medium Term Financial Outlook report to Cabinet in July 2026, in the event that any overspend in 2026/27 is not mitigated, the Council would need to make provision for replenishing the General Fund balance in 2027/28. The existing budget gap identified in the report is inclusive of some provision to increase reserves, but any further unmitigated pressures would add to this budget gap. At present, the risk of the council's unallocated reserves being depleted by 2027/28 is considered to be low, based on the actions being taken, but any increase to the forecasted overspend in 2026/27 will increase this risk. The Council will need to consider how this risk can be mitigated, while committing to increase reserves over the next two years to enhance its financial resilience and sustainability.