Questions from the Opposition and Other Non-Cabinet Members

Full Council – 16 November 2026

1. Question from Cllr Jasbinder Bajwa to Cllr Tina Amadi (Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Cost-of-Living Support)

The winter months can bring additional financial pressures for households, as rising energy bills and seasonal expenses put further strain on already stretched budgets. For residents on low incomes, older residents and those living with serious illnesses, these pressures can make it particularly difficult to make ends meet.

At a national level, the Government's recent Budget announced a £100 Breathing Space payment to help eligible households manage the cost of living, alongside plans to abolish gas standing charges, cut VAT on household energy bills and tackle energy debt.

Locally, Brent Council is providing financial support through a variety of measures so that residents know where to turn for help during the winter months.

Can the Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture and Cost-of-Living Support therefore:

(a) outline the series of measures that Brent Council is taking to support residents who are struggling financially this winter?

(b) confirm how many Brent households are expected to benefit from the £100 Budget Breathing Space payment; and the total value of the funding provided by Government to Brent Council to support residents?

(c) advise what the Council is doing to promote its new Council Tax exemption for residents with a terminal illness, to ensure eligible residents are aware of the scheme and receive the support they need?

Response:

(a) Brent Council provides a wide range of financial and practical cost-of-living support for residents, including:

- targeted financial support with household expense such as housing and Council Tax.
- Resident Support Fund and Crisis Payments for households facing unexpected financial expenses.

- Household Income Maximisation support.
- debt, financial and energy advice with partners, such as Citizens Advice Brent.
- advice and support with heating homes through the Warm and Well scheme.
- access to food support through Brent Hubs and our partner network; and
- warm spaces in our libraries, including hot drinks and coat donations.

Residents can find details of the support available on the council's cost-of-living help and advice webpage. This also signposts residents to additional schemes and support provided by other organisations. For residents who cannot access services online, our libraries provide free internet access, and Brent Hubs offer face-to-face advice and support.

(b) We anticipate that around 96,000 Brent households will benefit from the Labour Government's £100 Budget Breathing Space payment. We also understand that this Labour Government intends to provide additional discretionary support for financially vulnerable households whose properties fall outside Council Tax bands A to D. The Government will provide guidance on how the £100 payments will be administered or confirmed the total funding that Brent Council will receive to provide additional support to residents. We will consider the guidance and funding arrangements as soon as these are confirmed.

(c) To raise awareness of the new Council Tax exemption for residents with a terminal illness, the council has issued a press release and published information on its website. The exemption will also be promoted in the next edition of Your Brent magazine.

We have also shared details with Brent GPs and local voluntary and community organisations, as well as Marie Curie, which has confirmed that it will add Brent to its public list of councils offering this support.

2. Question from Councillor Angela Joyce de Souza to Councillor Liz Dixon n (Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Public Health)

Brent's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2026–2029, published earlier this year, highlights the scale of the challenge facing our borough. The Metropolitan Police recorded 3,754 domestic abuse offences in Brent in the year ending March 2024, while around 31% of domestic abuse victims reported multiple incidents. Even these figures, as highlighted in the strategy, represent only part of the picture, as many incidents of domestic abuse sadly remain unreported.

Members regularly hear from residents about the devastating impact of domestic abuse on women and families. Tackling this requires not only effective support for survivors, but a clear commitment from men to challenge misogyny and never use, excuse or remain silent about violence against women.

Will the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Public Health therefore confirm whether Brent will support White Ribbon Day 2026; pursue White Ribbon accreditation; encourage all councillors to make the White Ribbon Promise and undertake Champion training and also ask the Leader to write to the Mayor of London and the Government calling for sustainable, long-term funding for Brent's Violence Against Women and Girls services?

Response:

Brent Council fully recognises the importance of White Ribbon Day and the role that men and boys play in challenging the attitudes and behaviours that underpin violence against women and girls. White Ribbon Day 2026 will take place on 25th November, coinciding with the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and marking the launch of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence campaign.

This year's programme has been designed in line with the objectives of Brent's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2026-2029 and reflects learning from previous campaigns. Feedback and participation data have demonstrated that events explicitly branded as Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) activities can sometimes experience lower levels of community engagement due to the sensitive and often taboo nature of the subject matter. In response, Brent's 2026 campaign will adopt a prevention, empowerment and community wellbeing approach, using accessible themes to encourage participation whilst creating opportunities for meaningful conversations about safety and equality.

The campaign will officially launch on 25th November at Kilburn Library with an event entitled "The Intersectional Exploration of Violence in Literature." The event will create a welcoming and thought provoking space for residents to engage with the topic of male violence, reflect on the experiences of survivors and consider how communities can contribute to preventing VAWG. White Ribbons will be available at the Brent Civic Centre for councillors and will be made available to the public at the launch event at Kilburn Library.

Alongside the launch event, the 16 Days programme will include prevention work, a technology facilitated abuse workshop, a public exhibition, professional training opportunities, communications campaigns and a closing event promoting women's health and wellbeing. Collectively, these activities are designed to engage a broad and diverse audience, reduce the stigma associated with discussing violence and abuse and support the long term cultural change required to prevent VAWG.

The Council's commitment to prevention extends beyond the annual campaign period. In October 2026, the Community Safety Team launched its Domestic Abuse Champions Programme, which received 26 expressions of interest from staff across Housing, Adult Social Care, Children and Young People and Community Development, Libraries, Human Resources and Learning and Development. The programme aims to increase awareness of domestic abuse, strengthen early identification and signposting, and embed a culture of shared responsibility for tackling VAWG across council services. We will continue to work with partners, councillors, residents and colleagues to promote these principles through our VAWG Strategy and associated programmes.

3. Question from Councillor Sai Madabhushi to Councillor Cllr Muhammed Butt (Leader of the Council)

Brent Council's equality assessment of its Nablus twinning partnership recognised potential risks around antisemitism and community cohesion and committed to monitoring these concerns.

Following the Green Party's adoption of its "Zionism is Racism" policy and the subsequent intervention of the Equality and Human Rights Commission:

(1) Has the Council reviewed or updated its equality assessment of the Nablus partnership in light of these developments?

(2) What specific engagement has taken place with Jewish residents and community organisations since the policy was adopted, and what concerns have been raised with the Council?

(3) Have the Council's monitoring arrangements identified any change in complaints, antisemitic incidents or wider community tensions, and what additional steps will now be taken to protect community cohesion in Brent?

Response:

The Council's Equality Impact Assessment relating to the Nablus twinning has been kept under review since the partnership was established and was most recently reviewed in September 2026. The review considered updated information and intelligence, including Community Safety information and police data relating to antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crime. It continues to recognise both the potential benefits of the twinning and the sensitivities arising from the wider Israel/Palestine conflict, including the potential implications for community cohesion.

The twinning is a civic partnership and is separate from the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine and from the political positions or policies of individual political parties.

The Council recognises that national and international events and wider political debate can affect communities locally. The Council continues to monitor data relating to antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crime alongside wider community safety intelligence and feedback. The information considered through the assessment does not establish a causal relationship between the twinning and hate-crime levels or wider community tension.

As part of its wider response, the Council works closely with the Metropolitan Police and other partners to monitor emerging risks and support affected communities. This includes work with the police Community Protection Team, multi-agency planning around significant Jewish faith events, police-led Security Review Meetings and engagement with Counter Terrorism Policing. Brent also supports programmes aimed at preventing hate crime, encouraging reporting and strengthening community cohesion.

The Council maintains established relationships with Jewish residents, faith leaders, local synagogues and community organisations and continues to welcome feedback and dialogue from all of Brent's communities. This includes engagement through local synagogues and the Brent Multi Faith Forum, as well as supporting links between community representatives and policing partners. Following the attempted arson attack at Finchley Reform Synagogue in April 2026, officers contacted Jewish community representatives and visited local synagogues to offer support and listen to concerns, and the Chief Executive wrote to local Jewish faith leaders. Engagement has also continued through wider community and interfaith activity, including Holocaust Memorial Day planning.

The Council is due to meet with the Brent Nablus Twinning Association in November as part of the annual review of the partnership. This will provide a further opportunity to consider its progress and impact alongside relevant information from the Council's ongoing monitoring and engagement. The Equality Impact Assessment will continue to be kept under review, and the Council remains committed to tackling antisemitism, Islamophobia and all forms of hate and to promoting good relations and community cohesion across Brent.

4. Question from Councillor Nirmala Patel to Councillor Promise Knight (Cabinet Member for Cleaner Streets, Transport & Public Realm)

There is need to recognise the huge impact on individuals, particularly those such as carers and patients undergoing significant medical treatment who rely on local buses to attend medical appointments, created by bus stop closures (such as those currently on Ealing Road) whilst planned road works are taking place.

Whilst acknowledging that during periods of planned road works, temporary bus stops need to be set-up, given the challenges highlighted (particularly on busy routes such as those between Wembley and local hospitals) can the Cabinet Member for Cleaner Streets, Transport & Public Realm advise what engagement the council has with Transport for London (TfL) about the need to ensure that, when planned works are being undertaken, they are identifying suitable locations to set-up temporary bus stops along busy local routes to mitigate the impact of bus stop closures?

Response:

The Council recognises that the temporary closure of bus stops during roadworks can have a significant impact on residents, particularly older people, disabled passengers, carers and those travelling to medical appointments or other essential services.

Whilst responsibility for approving temporary bus stop arrangements and managing bus operations rests with Transport for London (TfL), Highway officers work closely with TfL and contractors where roadworks affect the highway network. Through the traffic management permitting process and regular liaison arrangements, the Council's Highway Network Team seeks to ensure that disruption is minimised wherever reasonably practicable.

Temporary bus stop locations are assessed by TfL, taking account of factors such as safety, accessibility, available highway space and operational requirements. Whilst some inconvenience may be unavoidable during major works, I would expect TfL and contractors to work together to ensure that temporary arrangements are as accessible and convenient as practicable, particularly on busy routes serving healthcare facilities and other key local destinations.

Where a bus stop suspension is required to facilitate planned works, Network officers will ask TfL to consider whether suitable temporary arrangements can be provided, taking account of the location, duration of the works and any operational constraints. For emergency works, where advance planning will not be possible, decisions regarding temporary bus stop provision will need to reflect safety considerations, the anticipated duration of the works and operational requirements.

Highways will continue to engage with TfL to ensure that the needs of residents, particularly those who rely on public transport to access healthcare and other essential services, are considered when temporary traffic management arrangements are being developed for planned works.

5. Question from Councillor Nisha Vakani to Councillor Jake Rubin (Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Employment & Climate Action):

Brent's School Place Planning Strategy recognises that some families can no longer afford to stay in the borough, while demand for school places varies across Wembley and Brent.

Can the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Employment and Climate Action advise:

(a) what trends the Council has identified in falling pupil numbers, particularly by location, ethnicity and household income or deprivation? Does it know why families are leaving and where they are going?

(b) How the Council is engaging with schools, parents and local communities to understand these trends, including the impact of housing costs, the shortage of family-sized homes and local services?

(c) whether the Council will publish these findings by March 2027, alongside concrete action to support affected schools and help families stay in Wembley and Brent?

Response:

(a) The School Place Planning Strategy 2024-28 3rd Refresh, considered by Cabinet on 9th November 2026, sets out the areas where demand for school places is reducing based on pupil forecasts that are informed by birth rates and migration patterns. The Council does not hold data on why families are leaving Brent.

However, the ONS does publish estimates on how many people have moved out of a local authority area and where they have moved to (provided they moved within the UK). ONS' internal migration data estimates that 44,191 people left Brent to other UK local authorities in year ending June 2025, breakdown by age included below. Over half of those who moved left for another London borough. Harrow was the most common destination, followed by Barnet and Camden

Age group	Number of people
0-4	2,413
5-9	1,727
10-14	1,458
15-19	2,253
20+	36,340
Total	44,191

The Council has evidence from a range of sources that informs understanding of the wider pressures facing families.

- Brent's **2026 Resident Attitudes Survey**, which gathered views from 2,207 residents, provides some insight into the financial pressures facing local households with around 1 in 7 residents reporting that they are

struggling financially. Of these, just over 1 in 3 (36%) lived in household with children under 18

- **Indices of Deprivation** data indicated that 96% of Brent's neighbourhoods are among the most deprived 10% nationally for wider barriers to housing and services, including housing affordability and overcrowding. 58.7% of children aged 0-15 in Brent live in income-deprived households, the fifth highest proportion nationally. Child income deprivation is particularly concentrated in Dollis Hill, Roundwood and Stonebridge which are among the most deprived 1% of neighbourhoods nationally.

Anecdotal data from headteachers and other professionals who work with families indicates that families are leaving the borough due to the cost and shortage of suitable housing and cost of living pressures.

(b) Brent is investing in data-led approaches, including the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT), to help identify households at risk of financial hardship and enable earlier, more proactive support before financial difficulties escalate. This forms part of the Council's wider Household Income Maximisation approach, bringing together housing, benefits, customer services and community support to help residents maximise their income, access the support they are entitled to and build greater financial resilience.

The Council recognises that housing costs and wider cost-of-living pressures can place significant strain on household finances and can influence the choices families are able to make about where and how they live. Brent therefore continues to provide a broad package of support, including the Resident Support Fund, Council Tax Support, the Council Tax Hardship Fund, Community Hubs, commissioned advice services and support from Best Start Family Hubs, as well as linking families with the voluntary sector.

Alongside this, the Council is strengthening its Household Income Maximisation service and developing community-based wellbeing approaches that bring together affordable food, welfare and benefits advice, employment support and income maximisation. Taken together, these measures and support services are intended to identify financial difficulties earlier, connect families with the right support and help residents achieve greater financial stability and resilience.

(c) The data referred to above is already in the public domain.

With regards to actions, the Children, Young People and Community Development directorate works with schools to manage the impact of reduced demand and pupil mobility, as set out in the School Place Planning Strategy 2024-28 3rd Refresh. This includes capping or reducing published admission numbers and repurposing spare capacity, for example to provide specialist provision for children and young people with SEND, to help schools to mitigate the impacts on school budgets of lower pupil numbers.

The range of support available to households is aimed at helping them to better manage financially. The Household Income Maximisation service, Community

Hubs, Best Start Family Hubs, early years settings and schools all sign-post families in hardship to support for which they may be eligible.