	Full Council 16 November 2026
	Report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources

Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee Chair's Update

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Council
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
List of Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 To present Full Council with progress updates on the activities of the Resources and Public Realm Committee ('the Committee') since the last Full Council meeting held on 14 September 2026.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 To note the update from the Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

3.1.1 The work of the Committee contributes to the delivery of all of the strategic priorities set out in the Borough Plan 2023-2027. It seeks to ensure Council decision-making remains transparent, accountable and open, resulting in improved policies and services.

3.2 Background

3.2.1 Brent Council has three scrutiny committees; the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee, the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and newly established Housing Scrutiny Committee. The Council is also a member of the North West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (NWL JHOSC).

3.2.2 A scrutiny committee can look at anything which affects the borough or its inhabitants, subject to its remit.

3.2.3 Brent Council Standing Orders allow for the chairs of the scrutiny committees to report to ordinary Council meetings on the activities of their committees[1].

<u>The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee</u>

3.2.4 The remit of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee is set out in the Council Constitution under the Terms of Reference for scrutiny committees[2]. The remit of the Committee includes:

Corporate policy, partnerships and resources; Budget; Customer services; Commercial services; Planning policy; Environmental policy; Public realm; Employment and skills; IT; Recycling; Regeneration; Transport and highways; Community safety; Property; Emergency planning and business continuity.

3.2.5 The Committee is also the Council's "crime and disorder committee" for the purposes of Section 19 of the Police & Justice Act 2006 and as such may review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge of the crime and disorder functions by the responsible authorities (as defined by section 5 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998) who make up the Safer Brent Partnership, in order to make reports or recommendations to Full Council.

3.2.6 Since the last update to Full Council on 14 September 2026, the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee has met once (20 October 2026).

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[1] Brent Council Constitution, Part 2, paragraph 36.
https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s123308/Part%202%20April%202022%20Procedural%20Rules.pdf

[2] Brent Council Constitution Part 4.
https://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s123310/Part%204%20May%202022%20Terms%20of%20Reference%20.pdf

2 September 2026

3.2.7 Whilst the Committee's consideration of matters at its meeting on 2 September 2026 was reported within the previous update to Full Council, the recommendations and suggestions for improvement arising from the following items had not been finalised at the time that report was published and are therefore outlined below.

Parking Provision and Policy Review:

3.2.8 The Committee considered current parking provision, management and policy across the borough, hearing from the Leader of the Council and receiving a report from the Corporate Director, Neighbourhoods and Regeneration, including an overview of the forthcoming Parking Policy Review. In light of the discussion, the Committee made the following recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Cleaner Streets, Transport and Public Realm:

- Develop, as part of the Parking Policy Review, a coordinated approach to addressing issues arising from food delivery and courier riders, as well as dockless hire bikes, including inappropriate parking, obstruction and wider public realm nuisance, through consideration of designated parking arrangements, engagement with operators and users, and alignment with wider transport, community safety and public realm policies.

- Explore, as part of the Parking Policy Review, opportunities to further enhance the visibility, clarity and effectiveness of School Streets signage and supporting measures beyond statutory requirements, improving driver awareness and reducing inadvertent non-compliance.

- Explore, as part of the Parking Policy Review, opportunities to strengthen the role of vehicle emissions, size and weight in future parking charges and permit arrangements, in support of the Council's environmental, transport and public realm objectives.

- Explore, as part of the Parking Policy Review, how parking and permit arrangements can best support residents and businesses in town centres and local high streets, balancing access needs through appropriate resident and business permit provision whilst supporting thriving local economies.

- Assess, as part of the Parking Policy Review, the potential long-term implications of autonomous vehicle technology for parking demand, kerbside activity and the allocation of road space, ensuring future parking policies remain adaptable to emerging transport trends.

Value for Money in Procurement & Contracts:

3.2.9 The Committee then examined value for money in procurement and contracts, hearing from the Leader of the Council and receiving an accompanying report

from the Corporate Director, Service Reform and Strategy. In light of the discussion, the Committee made the following suggestion for improvement to the directorate:

- Strengthen communications and engagement around forthcoming procurement opportunities, including the development of shareable content and resources that can be used by Council services and local councillors to raise awareness among local businesses of opportunities to become Council suppliers.

20 October 2026

3.2.10 The Committee considered the following items at its meeting on 20 October 2026.

Brent Climate and Ecological Emergency Programme and Strategy Update:

3.2.11 The Committee heard from the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Employment and Climate Action and considered a report from the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood and Regeneration on the progress of the Brent Climate and Ecological Emergency Programme and the forthcoming refreshed Strategy. The Committee also received deputations from Brent Friends of the Earth and Friends of Woodcock Park, with a number of issues raised through the deputations reflected in the subsequent discussion.

3.2.12 Members considered the factors affecting delivery of the borough's ambition to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, including the reasons why the target is no longer considered achievable and the lessons arising from progress to date. Discussion focused on the extent to which the Council is making full use of its existing services, budgets and community partnerships to deliver climate objectives, and whether greater coordination across the organisation could improve outcomes. The effectiveness and value for money of climate-related investment and initiatives was also examined, alongside the challenges affecting delivery. Consideration was given to the extent to which these challenges reflected wider funding pressures and external factors, whilst also recognising how local priorities, policy choices and actions within the Council's control can influence delivery of the Council's climate ambitions.

3.2.13 Within this context, particular attention was given to a number of climate indicators where progress has fallen short since the declaration of the Climate Emergency, including active travel and household waste, and what further action could be taken to improve performance. The Committee also considered the delivery of tree planting and maintenance programmes, including opportunities to strengthen outcomes through learning from other local authorities.

3.2.14 Looking ahead, and reflecting on the issues raised throughout the discussion, consideration was given to how the revised Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy will ensure that any future carbon neutrality ambition is supported by

realistic funding, resourcing and investment arrangements. Discussion focused on how the revised strategy will provide a more deliverable framework for achieving climate objectives and responding to areas where progress has been limited. Members also touched on how climate action can contribute towards wider social and economic objectives, including supporting residents with cost-of-living pressures, and the role of community engagement in encouraging participation in local climate action.

3.2.15 As part of its consideration of the Brent Climate and Ecological Emergency Programme and Strategy Update, the Committee undertook a detailed review into flood risk management, recognising the increasing importance of climate adaptation and resilience alongside efforts to reduce emissions. In doing so, evidence was received from the Cabinet Member for Cleaner Streets, Transport and Public Realm and representatives of the Environment Agency and Thames Water. Discussion focused on the Environment Agency's assessment of flood risk across Brent, including emerging risks, local priorities and Brent's performance as a Lead Local Flood Authority. Particular attention was given to the effectiveness of the Council's overall approach to flood risk management and resilience, including the management of known flood risks, flood alleviation activity, community awareness and partnership working across the borough.

3.2.16 Thus, members explored the contribution of key organisations involved in flood risk management, including the Council's powers and limitations in holding Thames Water to account for recurring flooding and pollution incidents. Assurance was sought that Thames Water is effectively addressing issues within its remit, alongside consideration of planned investment and partnership activity within Brent, the anticipated benefits for residents and expected delivery timescales, and arrangements for responding to flooding incidents and supporting affected residents.

3.2.17 In light of the discussion, the Committee made the following recommendations and suggestions for improvement:

<u>Recommendations to Cabinet Member</u>

- Develop stronger joint working arrangements with Thames Water, Affinity Water and the Environment Agency, including a jointly agreed action plan to address recurring flooding hotspots within the borough, and facilitate attendance at a future meeting to review responsibilities, planned investments, commitments, delivery timescales and opportunities to reduce flood risk and improve flood resilience across Brent.

<u>Suggestions for Improvement to Neighbourhoods and Regeneration Directorate</u>

- Further develop the existing climate dashboard to provide clearer reporting on the relationship between resources allocated and outcomes delivered, a more considered approach to target setting, and clearer identification of those indicators that fall within and outside of the Council’s direct control and influence.

- Strengthen arrangements for the maintenance and long-term resilience of trees across the borough, including adequate watering and aftercare for newly planted and stressed mature trees, greater community stewardship, and clear accountability for ongoing maintenance.

- Identify and pursue further opportunities for improved partnership working between Thames Water and the Council to support borough growth and improve residents' experience of water and wastewater services.

Suggestions for Improvement to Thames Water

- Increase investment in wastewater and drainage infrastructure across Brent, particularly in response to recurring concerns regarding capacity and blockages in the main sewer system that results in associated surface water drainage issues.

Quarter 2 Financial Forecast 2026/27:

3.2.18 The Committee then heard from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources and received the Quarter 2 Financial Forecast Report from the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources. Within the General Fund, members examined significant financial pressures within Adult Social Care. Discussion focused on the increasing cost of Adult Social Care provision, with new care packages typically 14-16% more expensive than those ending due to increasing complexity of need and market pressures. Members sought assurance regarding the effectiveness of procurement and commissioning arrangements in securing value for money and controlling expenditure and also considered the potential impact of winter demand pressures on the service's financial position. Attention was also given to the pressures within Resident and Housing Services arising from temporary accommodation, driven by driven by rising homelessness demand, increasing costs and limited supply. Discussion focused on the effectiveness of mitigation measures designed to reduce reliance on high-cost placements, including the speed at which these measures are being implemented and the extent to which they are helping to contain rising costs.

3.2.19 In response to the forecast overspend and ongoing General Fund pressures, members assessed both the delivery of savings agreed as part of the 2026/27 budget and the additional in-year mitigations being implemented to support the Council's financial position. The Committee reviewed delivery of the £10.4m savings programme agreed as part of the 2026/27 budget, noting that whilst overall savings targets remained broadly on track, some savings had been delivered through alternative measures to those originally proposed. Assurance was sought regarding the realism and deliverability of savings assumptions and emphasised the importance of clear delivery plans, accountability and transparency in how savings are achieved and monitored. Discussion also covered the additional £2.7m of in-year savings identified since Quarter 1, including how these savings had been generated and monitored, what had

been delivered to date, what remained outstanding, and the extent to which they would be sufficient to reduce budget overspends.

3.2.20 The Committee explored the growing financial pressures within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), including a forecast £20.8m in-year deficit driven primarily by rising demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Members considered the projected growth in the cumulative DSG deficit, sought assurance regarding the effectiveness of the Council's SEND reform programme in addressing underlying cost pressures and highlighted the financial risks associated with uncertainty over future Government support beyond 2026/27. Clearer future reporting on EHCP growth, placement demand and expenditure trends was also requested to support ongoing scrutiny.

3.2.21 Delivery and performance against the capital programme were also reviewed, including the reprofiling of £78.3m of expenditure into future years. Members highlighted the importance of transparency with residents regarding project delays, revised delivery timescales and the implications of changes to planned investment.

Council Tax Collection and Debt Recovery Performance:

3.2.22 The Committee considered a report from the Corporate Director, Residents and Housing Services on Council Tax Collection and Debt Recovery Performance, with contributions from the Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture and Cost-of-Living Support and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources. In-year Council Tax collection performance formed a key part of the review, particularly given Brent's comparatively low position within both the London and national rankings. Members explored the factors contributing to this position, the gap between Brent and comparable authorities achieving stronger collection rates, and the Council's long-term strategy for improving performance. Assurance was sought that lessons are being learned from comparator authorities and that improvement initiatives are capable of delivering sustained gains over time. Governance, monitoring and assurance arrangements supporting Council Tax collection and recovery were also addressed, including how performance is monitored, audited and reported, and how these arrangements are being used to drive continuous improvement and support delivery of the Council's collection objectives.

3.2.23 Recognising the relationship between current collection performance and the accumulation of historic debt, members questioned the Council's approach to debt recovery, including recovery rates for older debt, trends in debt write-offs and the extent to which the likelihood of recovery declines as debt ages. Discussion explored whether alternative approaches to debt management could be adopted to maximise recovery before debts reach the point at which write-off becomes necessary, whilst ensuring appropriate support remains available for residents experiencing financial hardship.

3.2.24 In light of the discussion, the Committee made the following suggestion for improvement:

- Strengthen arrangements for monitoring, reviewing and learning from errors and complaints arising from council tax collection and recovery processes, in order to support continuous improvement.

Next meeting: 26 January 2027

3.2.25 The next meeting of the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee will be held on 26 January 2027. As it currently stands, members will review the following items:

- Complaints Annual Report 2025/26
- ASB in Brent
- Borough of Sanctuary: Support for Migrant Communities

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 Members of the Committee continue to be fully engaged in the development and delivery of the scrutiny work programme.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 There are no financial considerations for the purposes of this report.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 There are no legal considerations for the purposes of this report.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 There are no EDI considerations for the purposes of this report.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 There are no climate change and environmental considerations for the purposes of this report.

9.0 Communication Considerations

9.1 There are no communication considerations for the purposes of this report.

Report sign off:

Minesh Patel
Corporate Director, Finance & Resources