

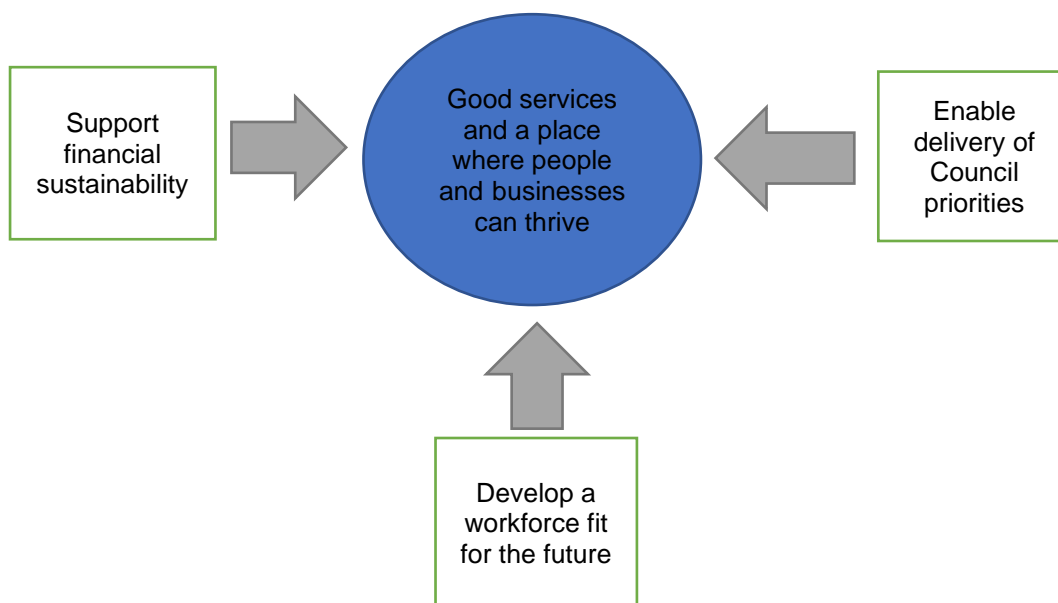
Organisational Priorities for Change 2024 -2026

1.0 Background

- 1.1 With some changes within the corporate management team, there has been an opportunity for a fresh perspective on how the organisation can harness its strengths and also improve and evolve to tackle emerging and current challenges in meeting the needs of our local communities. This includes how the organisation operates, is structured and is performing. Meetings as part of getting to know Brent have also enabled me to garner an external view from partners. I have been impressed by the commitment, competence and dedication that I have seen and there is clearly huge ambition and pride amongst the elected politicians and workforce. There are award winning services peppered throughout the Council along with Ofsted rated Good ones; a positive Residents Survey; an exemplary response to the Covid pandemic; and a recent LGC Council of the year award to name but a few accolades to be proud of and from which to build an even brighter future. Nonetheless, the ongoing financial sustainability of the Council depends on continuing to make significant cuts, find further efficiencies, and increase income generation to meet projected budget shortfalls following reductions in real terms government funding, rapid growth in demand and the increased costs of providing services. Despite the hugely challenging context there are positive opportunities for change which the Council can benefit from including new technology, enhanced relationships with partner organisations in the borough and even better and more productive engagement with our communities and external partners for tangible outcomes.
- 1.2 Changes in how we work, how we are structured and how we use insight, data and technology are required to embed these changes for the longer term. This paper sets out a programme of change which will enable the delivery of local priorities, secure ongoing financial sustainability, and attract and retain the workforce we need in order to enable better outcomes for our residents and to ensure Brent is a place where people and businesses can thrive.
- 1.3 There are several drivers for launching this programme of change now. At its most fundamental, it is required if we are to sustain the progress and pace in achieving some of the Council's longer-term priorities. Even without the burning platform of the financial imperative, standing still would not be an option for the Council. There is a need to adapt to a rapidly changing external context which compels a change of focus in many areas – a potential change in Government, likely moves to more devolution, continuing cost of living crisis, growing poverty and inequalities. It is a challenging period for service delivery, partly driven by demographics and increased and changing demand for services from some of our most vulnerable residents. Resident expectations about how, when and where they should be able to access Council services have shifted, most notably since the pandemic. While the pace of technological change presents some new challenges and risks, there's an opportunity to further unlock the enormous potential of digital technology to improve service delivery and efficiency and continue to create new service offerings to replace outdated ones and reflect resident needs. In summary, change is needed to maintain continuing effectiveness, remain financially sustainable and deliver improvements that will, combined, deliver better outcomes for our businesses and our residents.

2.0 Aims of the Change Programme

2.1 Drawing on previous experience and bearing in mind that the imminent staff survey results will also be woven in, the Change Programme will focus on three aims which are interdependent and key to ensuring that the Council can deliver good services as well as be a place where people and businesses can thrive. This will be a whole Council endeavour, working as one to deliver this programme.



2.2 *Enable the delivery of Council priorities:* this aim reflects the need for the organisation to increase pace and momentum to deliver the Borough Plan (we're now into 2024 with a General Election during the period as well as the Mayor and London Assembly elections, and then the local elections in May 2026) and improve outcomes for residents.

2.3 *Support our financial sustainability:* the Council has committed to running services efficiently and effectively. The programme of change will seek out every opportunity to ensure greater efficiency and maintain financial resilience while delivering the priorities in the Borough Plan and improving outcomes for residents.

2.4 *Develop a workforce fit for the future:* The workforce is the Council's single biggest asset in improving services and the place, but recruitment and retention is one of our biggest strategic risks and is one of the most challenging issue faced by the entire local government sector today. There is an opportunity to become an even more inclusive employer, with a diverse and representative workforce, which can better serve and reflect the communities in the borough, and by becoming an employer of choice. We need to use our workforce data smartly in a way that enables us to target interventions where we need to make most impact. We also need to ensure we harness the opportunities available to us from digitisation and AI, being proactive about designing jobs for the future.

2.5 This Change Programme is *not* about capturing everything the Council is doing to drive improvement and deliver on the Borough Plan. It is about the key cross-cutting enablers

that form the building blocks of an effective organisation and will drive our operating model in the future. The programme will be organised into eight workstreams, with more detail for each of them in Appendix 1:



*work already in progress

- 2.6 Our wider programme of improvement and transformation within services will continue. However, there will be an exercise to ensure we are prioritising the right things and using our resources intelligently, evaluating our current list of projects to agree whether they will stop/continue/be repurposed and whether any need realigning under the scope of the above programme.
- 2.7 We will also want to ensure there is a consistent approach to managing change across the Council, equipping our staff with the right skills (where they do not currently exist) to lead projects and programmes as Responsible Officers, for example, and how to be confident in evaluating benefits in a way which puts residents at the centre.

3.0 Change programme – immediate/short term priorities

- 3.1 This section provides a little more granularity about some of the immediate pieces of work that need to commence quickly. The overall objectives, deliverables and benefits of each of the programme building blocks will be developed in more detail over the coming weeks.
- 3.2 Organisational culture and workforce strategy
- 3.3 There is less cross Council collaboration than I had expected to see and not as much engagement with key partners/anchor institutions within Brent in a joined-up way. Furthermore, there is opportunity for more professional curiosity across the Council, to be less inward-looking and, with some notable exceptions, there are parts of the organisation that have lost their connection with our residents and the place. There is much to be proud of but with a much stronger focus on transforming the culture, even more can be achieved, unleashing the potential of the people who work here.
- 3.4 Using values that matter to staff, are made to come alive, and can be linked to behaviours, I am proposing a thorough refresh/review of the Council’s existing values. Currently, these are fairness, respect, equality and excellence and have been in place for some time but are neither particularly visible nor integrated into how we recruit, retain, manage and lead our staff. I would want to see an organisational culture which encourages creativity, collaboration and leadership at all levels. We need to always be

ambitious with and for our residents, being open to challenge so that we can do even better.

- 3.5 Our staff play a critical role in the delivery of the Borough Plan as well as in shaping the future of what Brent looks and feels like, how it is experienced by our residents and businesses. They need to be clear on their purpose, priorities and objectives in order to maintain integrity, accountability and deliver better outcomes. We need to foster open, honest and constructive conversations to enable and empower staff to shape and understand the impact of their work on delivering against priorities. Staff must be supported, coached and managed in a way that allows them to ask questions, innovate and feel confident in their work. Staff, regardless of their role, need to focus on working collaboratively – internally and externally – to deliver outcomes within available budgets.
- 3.6 We need to ensure, on top of the golden thread of equity, diversity and inclusion, the essential elements are in place to underpin a new workforce strategy, namely:
- Leadership and Management – Ensuring that leaders and managers at all levels have the right knowledge and skills to lead and support teams and individuals.
 - Performance and Development – Ensuring that the workforce has the right knowledge and skills; developing competent, confident and resilient practitioners; accessing the right qualifications and opportunities for continuing professional development, training and progression.
 - Culture, Values and Ways of Working – Supporting the workforce in developing a supportive, inclusive culture, working in partnership, with shared values and rewarding individual and team contribution.
 - Resourcing and Talent – Attracting and retaining good quality staff, using best practice techniques and good planning.
- 3.7 This will be a workstream designed in conjunction with the new Director of HR and OD (plus the additional strategic capacity set out at the end of this paper), alongside staff themselves cocreating it then being part of the delivery of it, and will typically be a 2-year piece of work to develop and embed the values, establish a new workforce strategy and then see the changes we want to see. The engagement of Members in this journey of reviewing and refreshing our organisational values must also be considered and planned for. However, the work on the values will be a priority for the Director of HR and OD to commence following her arrival at the beginning of this month. Embedded at its heart will be our workforce Equity, Diversity and Inclusion strategy. In addition, central to this will be good organisational development, which is the deep connection between the best business processes and structures on the one hand, and the people working within the organisation on the other. In short, it is to create great organisations!
- 3.8 Strategic Partnerships
- 3.9 The intention behind this is to support anchor institutions, strategic stakeholders, businesses and ourselves to work together more collaboratively in order to make a positive impact locally over the long term, typically a 10-year time horizon. We will need to consider the whole borough and work across organisations, looking at the big challenges that no single organisation or partnership can solve on its own, and work towards solving them together. By working more strategically together it will optimise the local benefits of our spending, services and recruitment for the delivery of shared priorities. In addition, the Council's role as a convenor for the place, bringing the right people and organisations together – such as businesses, faith groups, schools, colleges and community-based partners - brokering change and building trusted relationships

could be strengthened. Putting strategic collaboration at the centre of our work, bringing together key partners across Brent, will mean we can harness our collective influence to ensure delivery in our most impactful areas. This also speaks to workstream one and the need for a more outward looking and collaborative approach as an organisation. It will also enable us to better hear and articulate the role of the VCS in Brent, how their capacity can be built and where we want to commission services with and by them. It will also help shape a new approach to a new strategic commissioning framework and will see the creation of a new Director post to lead on this.

- 3.10 Managing partnerships effectively requires addressing perceived power imbalances, as well as having the necessary skills, capacity, and resources. Furthermore, transparency on goals and processes is key to establishing trust between partners, and public-private-third sector partnerships should be seen as ‘anchors’ in the delivery of local placemaking. Modern partnership working involves multiple partners delivering on different levels, with a requirement of shared civic purpose, mutual assurances and a relational mindset. Evaluations of partnerships have also expanded beyond a singular focus on value for money to include much deeper consideration of local impact and social value. In the context of much reduced resources across all the public sector organisations in Brent, I am advocating for a renewed approach (akin to the Total Place Government initiative launched in 2009) towards making more effective use of existing budgets, with the aim of understanding how local public services are funded, designed, joined up and delivered, in order to make links between services and social value and to see where public money can be spent more effectively and better outcomes delivered for residents.
- 3.11 Starting with developing a shared vision for “Team Brent”, at an event to be held in late May 2024 (t.b.c), we would want to agree how we will all work together to take an ‘anchor’ approach to, say, raising the bar on employment levels, increasing local spend and reducing our carbon impact. It will be about strengthening the local economy and contributing to positive outcomes across employment, skills, health and wellbeing for local people. The engagement of schools and colleges as part of this work will be crucial given their importance in and amongst our communities. We will need to start planning in January for the event, identifying and laying the groundwork with key partners, using a data and insight lead approach to determine what some of the shared priorities might be.
- 3.12 We also need to get smarter at using the data/evidence/insight that we have from a variety of sources (e.g. Census 2021, JSNA, Hubs data, various corporate dashboards e.g. the financial inclusion dashboards, partners data) to identify those geographical areas and those communities where our (ever decreasing) resources and interventions can make most impact/need to be concentrated.
- 3.13 This is also linked to our role in Placemaking – the holistic approach to the planning, design and management of local areas – with our services playing a key underpinning role alongside more eye-catching work like public realm improvements and economic development. In changing an organisational culture, developing a more strategic way of working with partners and shifting to more of a focus on our communities, in the context of much reduced resources, refreshing our way of working on the ground is essential. Building on the locality work already taking place, such as with the Brent Hubs, this might mean, for example, convening a locality focussed cross-Council and multi-agency group over a medium term time horizon looking at St Raphael’s estate in order to tackle the enduring and systemic challenges there, rather than taking a view through a single

service or agency perspective. This will be linked to the new approach to engaging with communities too, harnessing better their power and building their resilience, as well as the review of how Brent Connects work.

3.14 Community Power and Resilience

- 3.15 Community power is based on the principle that people have insight, experience and capabilities which are meaningful and real. Recognising this simple principle has big consequences for how decisions are made, both over the local areas that communities live in and over the services that people collectively use. The combined insight of communities into how they experience the local economy, public services and wider civic life is vitally important – they understand deeply the barriers and opportunities that exist in their daily lives. If communities had more influence, and where possible more direct control over the decisions and resources that affect them, this would better inform the nature of our support, increase the impact of our investment and result in improved, more sustainable outcomes. This approach and principle will help to shape our renewed commissioning framework, will impact on our customer access as well as our property strategy and we can already see this in action as part of our strengths based practice in social work.
- 3.16 Strong, thriving communities are a good in themselves, because they directly improve the lives of those within them. These are communities which are rich in civic assets – grassroots community organisations, a strong local civic realm of active groups and associations, places where local people can come together, where relationships, connection and social capital are nurtured. A wealth of evidence links community power to a range of individual health, community wellbeing and cohesion outcomes. Research has found that where these community features are lacking and social fabric has decayed, outcomes for people across a range of measures are worse. Therefore, our ability to work in ways that support community-based prevention and social foundations is critical – recognising the value of relationships in communities and informal networks of support that bind people together. Public services are seeing the benefits of moving towards practices which involve actively collaborating with communities. New methods of enabling community insights to shape action are increasingly being developed and we will be able to learn from these and use what’s most appropriate for Brent.
- 3.17 Research has shown that there are generally three clusters of approaches which hand more power and resources to communities:
- **Community decision-making:** Involving citizens more meaningfully in local decision-making.
 - **Collaboration with communities:** Public services shifting from hierarchical and siloed ways of working to more collaborative approaches which deeply involve communities as equal partners with essential insights.
 - **Building community capacity and assets:** Equipping communities, and, in some cases, the VCS, with the resources and skills they need to mobilise and genuinely participate in local action.
- 3.18 The evidence also demonstrates six ways in which community power has real, tangible impact for people, communities and public services:
1. **Community power can improve individual health and wellbeing.** From well-established peer-support groups to innovative community-led approaches,

practitioners are recognising that people need to be active participants in all efforts to improve their health and wellbeing. They are also seeing the benefits this participation can bring for people.

- 2. Community power can strengthen community wellbeing and resilience.** Involving people in decision-making, alongside supporting them with resources and wider social infrastructure, can enable community action to improve wellbeing and resilience locally.
- 3. Community power can enhance democratic participation and boost trust.** A variety of deliberative methods can be used to navigate complex socio-economic challenges and to strengthen legitimacy of decision-making. It is at the local level that this dialogue and engagement can be most meaningfully realised.
- 4. Community power can build community cohesion.** The common understanding and social ties that are necessary for cohesion cannot be imposed in the abstract from the national level. Community-anchored approaches demonstrate that cohesion is most sustainably built from the ground up.
- 5. Community power can embed prevention and early intervention in public services.** Where some parts of the public sector are pioneering new approaches that draw on the capabilities and capacities of communities, they demonstrate a route to more sustainable and prevention-focused public services.
- 6. Community power can generate financial savings.** There is growing evidence that investing in community power approaches can generate greater impact for existing spend and save money in the longer-term.

3.19 The first and most important route to community power is organisational culture change. This involves a deliberate shift from paternalistic and transactional mindsets and behaviours, towards an open and collaborative culture. It is a change that will embed within our workforce the belief that the solutions to our biggest challenges can be found out in the community – not inside the walls of the Civic Centre. This is the foundation on which a community-powered approach is built and should form the basis of the newly developed Community Engagement Framework. Without it, progress will be halting and even impossible. With it, we can discover the multiple, unpredictable opportunities for community power that best suits the diversity of communities within its local area. While this workstream is perhaps the least well defined currently, it will take better and clearer shape after a proposed facilitated PCG and SLT session and is clearly linked to the organisational culture change at 3.2.

3.20 Strategic Commissioning and Procurement

3.21 Our commissioning and procurement budgets and levers are amongst the most important activities undertaken by any local authority. It can have a very significant impact on people's lives. When it works well it contributes to significantly improving people's lives. When it does not it undermines them because services do not reflect their needs..

3.22 The establishment of a new post of Director, Strategic Commissioning and Capacity Building and department to sit beneath it, is intended to help Brent improve the quality of commissioning and procurement practice and, therefore, the quality and coherence of services for the people, organisations, communities and businesses of Brent. It will be focused on driving value for money across all our strategic contracts and supply chains, designing & delivering market solutions to maximise benefits for our residents. As well as managing our own services, we also need to influence and shape services

provided by other organisations. This is particularly important for social care, with a mixed economy of provision and a heavy reliance on the private and third sectors, which, for example, must complement the care and support provided by families and unpaid carers in social care. Our commissioning and procurement decisions also influence the range of services available to those who live in social housing, who benefit from public health and community safety interventions too. In addition, it is not enough for us simply to be concerned with planning the services that we fund. We have a responsibility to ensure that services provided by the wide range of different agencies available in Brent are well planned, designed and delivered. Commissioning and procurement provide the tools which enable us to use our resources and our influence to shape the development of services across the whole care system and large parts of other interdependent system too, and to ensure that these services best address the needs of our residents.

- 3.23 I want to see a model developed which is outcomes focused and efficiency savings motivated, which is data and intelligence led and which sits at the heart of a community of practice across the Council, working to strengthen and support expertise and knowledge sharing. We also need to ensure we have the right people with the right skills and competencies that underpin effective and efficient commissioning. We must be able to turn the political ambitions in the Borough Plan into reality. This includes supporting community wealth building by encouraging retention of investment in the Brent economy and connecting local businesses to help them access supply chain opportunities as well as ensuring we encourage all the organisations we buy services from to provide benefit to our local communities, through jobs, skills, apprenticeships and training places

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