

Ashley Dalton MP  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Public Health and Prevention  
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London  
SW1H 0EU

Kate Dearden MP  
Minister for Employment Rights and Consumer Protection  
Department for Business and Trade  
Old Admiralty Building  
Admiralty Place, London  
SW1A 2DY

Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2025

Dear Ashley and Kate,

**Re: Brent Council request for a ban on paan containing tobacco or betel nut**

We write on behalf of Brent Council to raise urgent concerns about the escalating issue of paan spitting in our borough. Paan is a mixture of ingredients, including betel nut, herbs, spices and often tobacco, wrapped in betel leaf. The mixture is chewed and then spat out, giving the user a narcotic effect. The use of both tobacco and betel nut poses serious cancer risks and is especially prevalent within South Asian communities, resulting in a disproportionate health burden for residents in Brent.

Alongside the clear impacts on public health, Brent has experienced a growing prevalence of paan spitting within its public spaces. When paan is spat onto pavements and shopfronts, it leaves unsightly, blood-red staining that often cannot be removed even with high-pressure cleaning. Areas including Wembley and Ealing Road now experience routine staining which has become a visible and persistent feature of our town centres, drawing increasing attention through both traditional media and social media platforms.

For reasons outlined in this letter, the council is calling on the government to introduce a ban on the sale of paan products containing tobacco and betel nut, and to fund a pilot scheme to boost the capacity of our Trading Standards Team to crack down on the illicit tobacco products related to paan, alongside targeted support for our public realm teams to remedy existing damage to streets and buildings.

**Public Health**

The public health consequences associated with paan use are severe and well established. Chewing paan that contains tobacco, or betel nut significantly increases the risk of oral, oesophageal and head and neck cancers. Nationally, 16.13 cases of head and neck cancer are diagnosed per 100,000 people. In Brent, by contrast, this rises to 90.05 cases per 100,000, a rate more than five times the national average.

Betel nut, even when consumed without tobacco, is now recognised internationally as carcinogenic. The World Health Organization has formally classified areca nut as a cause of cancer in humans and has urged countries to take steps to reduce its consumption. These health harms are not evenly distributed: South Asian communities are disproportionately affected, contributing to widening inequality in health outcomes and increasing pressure on primary care, oncology services and wider NHS provision in west London.

**Public Realm**

Paan spitting imposes a significant and ongoing cost on Brent Council, with annual expenditure to remove stains from pavements and buildings estimated at approximately £30,000. Despite this level of spend, the betel leaves and nuts that give paan its distinctive red colour cause immediate and often permanent damage to public surfaces and even repeated high-

pressure jet washing frequently fails to fully remove the staining. The result is long-term disfigurement of streets, shopfronts and public places, undermining community confidence and residents' pride in their local environment. The extent of the issue is now such that it consistently attracts public complaint, reinforcing the widespread perception that this problem is escalating rather than receding.

### Trading Standards

The sale of paan containing tobacco is closely linked to the illegal tobacco trade. Between the start of 2025 and 6 November 2025, Brent Council's Trading Standards service seized 81 kg of chewing tobacco and 16 kg of oral tobacco, representing almost double the volume seized during the previous year. The majority of these goods were imported products lacking appropriate health warnings, duty marks and ingredient labelling, and were typically sold under the counter from small retail premises.

Trading Standards officers have found that most paan tobacco products sold locally originate from illegal supply routes. As seen with other illicit tobacco products, this activity supports organised criminal networks, puts consumers at risk and undermines legitimate retailers. Current enforcement arrangements mean councils remain locked in a reactive model focused on seizure rather than meaningful disruption of criminal supply networks.

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Brent Council has taken sustained and decisive action to tackle this issue locally. We have enforced a zero-tolerance approach to paan spitting, expanded education campaigns and pursued enforcement activity wherever possible. Despite this, the scale and complexity of the problem continues to grow and increasingly lies beyond the ability of individual councils to contain through local action alone.

Brent Council submitted detailed evidence to the now-closed Call for Evidence on the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, including data on cancer prevalence, illicit trade and environmental harm arising from paan consumption. Our submission highlighted the continued regulatory gap around paan and betel nut which remains unaddressed within national tobacco frameworks.

Taken together, this evidence demonstrates that voluntary behaviour change and local enforcement alone will never be enough, and that decisive national leadership is now required to close regulatory gaps and protect public health and the integrity of town centres across the country.

### Our asks:

1. Include a ban on the sale of paan products containing tobacco or betel nut within the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, or issue statutory guidance to the same effect.
2. Work with impacted councils to establish a pilot scheme to support with the removal of existing paan stains on our high streets.
3. Convene a cross-government taskforce spanning the Home Office, National Crime Agency, Department for Business and Trade and Department of Health and Social Care to pursue organised criminal networks exploiting regulatory loopholes to import illicit paan products into the UK.

After a decade of efforts to discourage the use of paan, the council has hit the limit of what it can do without national policy change. We'd be delighted for you or your officials to visit Brent and witness firsthand the scale and impact of this issue and to discuss how we can work in partnership to protect public health, restore pride in our high streets and disrupt organised criminal activity in local supply chains.

Yours sincerely,



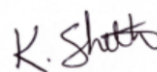
**CLLR MUHAMMED BUTT**

Leader of Brent Council



**CLLR NEIL NERVA**

Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care,  
Public Health and Leisure



**CLLR KRUPA SHETH**

Cabinet Member for  
Public Realm and Enforcement