

MINUTES OF THE FORWARD PLAN SELECT COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 14th April 2004 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor R Blackman (Chair), Councillor Dromey (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Harrod, Sengupta and Taylor.

Also present were Councillors Coughlin and Sayers.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Moher.

1. **Order of Business**

RESOLVED:-

that the order of business be changed to that set out below.

2. **Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

There were none.

3. **Deputations**

The Chair confirmed that requests to make deputations had been received from Mr Pollack and Mr Chambers concerning the item on Youth and Community Centres Review – Update.

RESOLVED:-

that the deputations be heard at the start of the item on Youth and Community Centres Review – Update.

4. **Briefing Notes requested by the Select Committee arising from consideration of the Forward Plan (*Issue 21 and Issue 22 – 2003/04*)**

- ***Youth and Community Centres Review - Update***

Gladstone Park

The Chair invited Mr Chambers and Mr Pollack to make their deputations to the Select Committee.

Mr Chambers advised Members about three main concerns regarding the proposed developments at Gladstone Park and the proposed development of changing rooms at the park. These concerns were:-

- (i) That there had been little consultation with residents and/or Members of the Gladstone Park Consultative Committee regarding the overall proposed developments at the Park;
- (ii) That there has been no consultation regarding the proposed changes to the changing rooms; and
- (iii) That some park land might be used for car parking.

Mr Chambers sought assurances from the Select Committee that a car park would not be provided at the Gladstone Centre, despite the Council's long-standing support for car parking facilities at the top of the park. He also sought confirmation that in the future, local residents and Members of the Gladstone Park Consultative Committee would be consulted on proposed developments at the site.

Mr Pollack then went on to address the Select Committee and referred to the planned changes to the changing rooms at the Centre, for which a decision had earlier been deferred by the Planning Committee. Whilst acknowledging the need to develop the Gladstone Centre, Mr Pollack stressed the need to preserve and maintain the green space within the park by minimising the proposed WC improvements. Consequently, Members were asked to consider the need for an integrated plan which served the interests of all by providing WC facilities and some parking facilities within the park whilst taking into account environmental concerns and preserving grass space.

The Lead Member for Corporate Resources then provided the Select Committee with a status report on the developments at Gladstone Park and explained that negotiations were still underway between the Council, Barnardos and the current leaseholder regarding the refurbishment of the Gladstone Centre as a Children's Resource Centre, as per the bequest of a local resident. The Lead Member stressed the commercial sensitivity of the negotiations and explained that whilst there had already been some lengthy delays to the developments, the process was expected to be on-going. Marcus Perry (Head of Corporate Property) advised the Select Committee that there had, to date, been no consultation with local residents as the basis of the deal was not yet known. The Select Committee noted that once the negotiations had concluded, local residents and park users would be consulted. Regarding the parks initiative and the proposed improvements to the changing rooms, local residents and users would again be consulted. In response to a query from the Chair concerning timing for consultation, Mr Perry confirmed that a meeting was scheduled to take place the following week with Barnardos and that consultation might commence within five weeks. Responding to

concerns raised by Members about the need to avoid the summer holiday period during consultation, the Lead Member gave assurances that consultation would be deferred until after the August 2004. Following a further suggestion by the Chair, Mr Perry advised Mr Chambers that he would be pleased to attend the next meeting of the Gladstone Park Consultative Committee to update residents about the status of the proposed developments.

Councillor Sayers expressed his support for the issues raised by Messrs Pollack and Chambers and highlighted his concerns about the lack of consultation with both local residents and ward Councillors regarding the proposals for Gladstone Park. The Lead member responded that following the original Youth and Community Centres Review, a number of ward Councillors had been consulted and that further and wider consultation would take place on the outlines of the proposals should the development go ahead.

The Chair acknowledged the public's concerns regarding the lack of information about the site since August 2003 when it was first considered by the Executive and stressed the need for on-going consultation and liaison with the Gladstone Park Consultative Committee regarding any proposed changes.

Members of the Select Committee then went on to consider other elements of the review and received updates on the following youth and community centres:-

28 High Street

Marcus Perry confirmed that the Council was now able to go ahead with negotiations having concluded that the current occupiers were in no way linked to the previous occupiers. Members noted that a similar lease of 5-7 years had been offered and was still under discussion.

The Pakistan Centre

Members noted that there was still some confusion regarding ownership of the centre given that it was located on Council land. Consequently, discussions were on-going regarding the payment of rent by the Centre and it was hoped that the matter would be resolved shortly. Councillor Sengupta queried why there had been so much drift regarding the matter and was advised that the Council had been attempting to resolve the lease and rent issue since August 2003.

Learie Constantine Centre

Members noted that a meeting had recently taken place with the Trustees and the proposal agreed. Consequently, repayments to the Council had commenced and would continue until March 2006.

Preston Mall

Members noted that a surveyor had condemned the out-building and that the cost implications of renovating the whole building could be significantly high. Consequently, further investigations were necessary to assess the centre and determine the cost implications of any future improvement and /or redevelopment options.

Wembley Centre

Members were advised that this was an on-going issue that was dependent on the redevelopment of Copland School, which was subject to a decision being taken by the Planning Committee in the near future.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the briefing note be noted;
- (ii) that an information update on progress regarding the Youth and Community Centres report be presented to the June meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee; and
- (iii) that the deputations regarding Gladstone Park be noted and the concerns raised by Mr Chambers and Mr Pollack fed back to the Executive by the Lead Member for Corporate Resources.

5. Information Update requested by the Forward Plan Select Committee at its meeting on 17th March 2004

At its meeting on 17th March 2004, the Select Committee requested an update regarding the following item:-

- **522-524 Kingsbury Road – Lease Renewal**

The Lead Member for Corporate Resources advised the Select Committee that the Council was in the process of going through arbitration with the landlord regarding the lease costs following a disagreement over future charges. Councillor Dromey expressed

concern at what action was being taken and the implications for tenants who were particularly concerned about the security of the tenure. The Select Committee was advised that the lease would be renewed once the courts had determined a reasonable level of rent.

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note and the verbal update be noted.

6. **Briefing Notes requested by the Select Committee arising from consideration of the Forward Plan (*Issue 21 and Issue 22 – 2003/04*)**

- **Supply, Demand & Temporary Accommodation**

The Director of Housing and the Assistant Director, Housing Needs/ Private Sector responded to Members' questions concerning the briefing note on Supply, Demand and Temporary Accommodation. Members noted that the report was submitted to the Executive annually and looked at the previous years performance with regards to lettings and an in depth analysis of demand and expenditure. The Select Committee noted that the report would be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 26th April 2004, at which time it would consider targets for housing allocation, homelessness and temporary accommodation in 2004/05.

The Director of Housing commented on the pressures on the Council to reduce usage of B & B temporary accommodation but highlighted the resulting effect of there being far more people being housed in cramped conditions. Consequently, other initiatives were necessary to ease these problems. With regards to budget, the Director confirmed that this was predominantly demand led but that the issue of funding and payments to landlords involved in the provision of temporary accommodation would be subject to numerous changes in the future.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Director of Housing confirmed that information regarding the housing of asylum seekers from 8 new EEC countries was slowly being provided by the Home Office and that changes to the provision of and eligibility for Housing Benefit and housing were anticipated in the future. Councillor Harrod referred to the Barker Report and expressed concern that the majority of lettings were restricted to smaller sized properties and that the Council lacked a sufficient number of larger sized properties. The Assistant Director confirmed that as stated in the Barker Report, the supply of adequate sized housing remained a

problem for all authorities but that affordability remained a key issue. Consequently, local authorities needed to try and identify alternative initiatives for tackling housing problems.

In response to a query about nominations, the Director explained that nomination agreements would not change but that there was increasing pressure from the G-15 (a pressure group of large Housing Associations) for 30% of nominations to the Council to be allocated for key workers. Members acknowledged that such changes would ultimately result in the de-prioritisation of the statutory requirement to assist homeless people. The Director confirmed that whilst more money was made available for social housing, additional resources had been channelled into key worker housing rather than public housing.

Councillor Harrod enquired about Regional Housing Boards and was advised by the Director of Housing that these had been established twelve months ago with the objective of allocating capital resources to local authorities and housing associations, subject to final approval by Ministers. Members noted that all boroughs received 70% of the money they would usually receive with the remaining 30% allocated to specific projects, the majority of which went on increasing the housing supply via Housing Associations. This funding was allocated over a two year period and there were no assurances that after two years, any additional money would be made available.

Councillor Taylor enquired about the private landlord advertising campaign and was advised that the campaign had been very successful with over 600 properties identified by private landlords and 140 properties identified as part of the Empty Homes campaign.

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note and the verbal responses from the Director of Housing and the Assistant Director, Housing Needs/ Private Sector be noted.

- ***Willesden Sports Centre – Closure Relocation Strategy***

Members queried which groups would be affected by the proposed changes and sought further clarification about the future relocation arrangements for the various users and user groups at Willesden Sports Centre.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the briefing note be noted;
- (ii) that a more detailed briefing note be presented to the Select Committee on 10th May 2004 confirming which groups would be affected by the proposed changes and clarifying the future relocation arrangements for the various users and user groups at Willesden Sports Centre; and
- (iii) that the Lead Officer and Lead Member be requested to attend the meeting on 10th May 2004 and respond to Members' questioning.

- **Final Admissions Arrangements**

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note be noted.

- **E-Government Programme 2004/05**

Dane Wright (Strategy and Service Development Manager) outlined the Council's E-Government Programme 2004/05 and confirmed that a budget of £1m had been allocated for the programme of activities in 2004/05. Members were advised that Best Value and performance indicators would measure achievement of the national programme. Members noted that Brent had achieved 72% of the overall programme targets in 2003/04 and that 84% was anticipated in 2004/05 and 100% expected in 2005/06. Mr Wright confirmed that E-procurement was an area in need of improvement and that plans were underway with the procurement section to address the issues.

In comparison with other local authorities both in London and nationally, Members noted that Brent was reasonably well positioned in all areas of E-Government, aside from the issue of procurement. Councillor Dromey enquired about how E-Government was realistically benefiting residents and was advised that there had been tangible results with improved collection rates for fines as a result of IT improvements and the development of the Council's website, the CRM system in the One Stop Shop and enhanced on-line payment facilities. Members were advised that Brent's website was listed as one of the top twenty sites in the country. Mr Wright confirmed that the results of a recent Mori survey on internet usage in the Borough showed that 1/3rd of residents now used the website and the use

of e-mail had also risen dramatically with a 20-25% increase. Consequently, the demand for improved IT accessibility and facilities existed.

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note and the verbal update be noted.

- **Disability Discrimination Act – Fourth Progress Report**

Marcus Perry (Head of Property Services) explained that the forthcoming report to the Executive on 26th April 2004 provided an update on the Council's compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act, which would come into full effect in October 2004. Consequently, the Council was in the process of ensuring that all of its buildings were accessible. In response to a query concerning accessibility at local schools, Mr Perry confirmed that whilst schools had originally been excluded from the DDA regulations it was now necessary to try and improve accessibility as far as possible. Consequently, it was felt that the majority of ground floor access could be improved in schools across the borough and, subject to funding, upper floor access would also be undertaken. Regarding non compliance in some schools, Mr Perry confirmed that approximately 18 buildings did not comply with the DDA's regulations including Designworks in Harlesden, but that all efforts would be made to make any possible access improvements.

Councillor Taylor enquired about access at Oakington Manor School and Mr Perry confirmed that he would provide further details about the proposals for this particular school. Councillor Harrod queried the Disability Awareness Training that had been undertaken and was advised that all Council employees had participated in interactive training and assessment provided by I&deA/ Grass Roots Group PLC and the Council had achieved a 98% pass rate for disability awareness. Councillor Sengupta expressed some concern about people's perceptions about disability and queried whether improved access in the Council's buildings was sufficient to try and improve the existing culture. Mr Perry explained that a first class consultant had been contracted and that as the funding was available to improve access this would be done as best as possible.

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note be noted.

- **Education Capital Budget 2004/05**

Members of the Select Committee acknowledged that the Lead Officer and the Lead Member for this item had been unable to attend the meeting and were advised that this report had been deferred to the Executive meeting scheduled to take place in May 2004. Consequently, the Select Committee requested that this item be brought back to the meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee on 10th May 2004.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that a briefing note be circulated for the May meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee; and
- (ii) that the Lead Officer and the Lead Member for this item be requested to attend the May meeting and respond to Members' questioning.

- **Draft Air Quality Action Plan**

Members commented on the lack of detail contained in the briefing note and acknowledged apologies from both the Lead Member and the Lead Officer.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the briefing note be noted;
- (ii) that the Lead Officer and the Lead Member for this report be present at the June meeting to respond to Members' questioning.

7. **Minutes of Previous Meeting – 17th March 2004**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 17th March 2004 be received and approved as an accurate record.

8. **Matters Arising**

There were none.

9. **Call-in of Executive Decisions from the Meeting of the Executive on 29th March 2004**

There were none.

10. **The Executive List of Decisions from the Meeting of the Executive on 29th March 2004**

The Chair referred to the Executive's decision regarding Transport Grants to Voluntary Organisations and explained that he was scheduled to meet the Lead Member for Health and Social Care to discuss the issues further, following the Select Committee's consideration of this item and its earlier recommendations. He stressed again the Select Committee's request from the meeting on 17th March 2004 for a further report and requested that the relevant Lead Officer and Lead Member be advised.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the Executive List of Decisions from its meeting on 29th March 2004 be noted;
- (ii) that a further report on this matter be presented to a future meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee in response to those concerns that were raised at the meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee on 17th March 2004.

11. **The Forward Plan (*Issue 23 2003/2004*)**

Issue 23 (5th April to 30th July 2004) and Issue 24 (19th April to 13th August 2004) of the Forward Plan had previously been circulated to Members of the Select Committee. Following consideration of these documents, the Select Committee requested further information on the following issues:

RESOLVED:-

that the following information updates and briefing notes be circulated for the meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee on 10th May 2004:-

- (a) **Transport Grants to Voluntary Organisations.** Request that an update report, as previously requested by the Select Committee be presented to the May meeting;
- (b) **Willesden Sports Centre – Closure Relocation Strategy.** Request for a more in depth briefing note on the main issues

and for the Lead Member and Lead Officer to attend the next meeting and respond to Members' questioning.

- (c) **Education Capital Budget 2004/05.** Request that the Lead Officer and Lead Member attend the meeting in May and respond to Members' questioning on a more in depth briefing note.
- (d) **Draft Air Quality Action Plan.** Request that the Lead Officer and Lead Member attend the meeting in June and respond to Members' questioning on a more in depth briefing note.
- (e) **Supplementary Planning Guidance Notes: Design Statements and Affordable Housing.** Request that a briefing note be circulated for the May meeting.

12. **Items considered by the Executive that were not included in the Forward Plan**

There were none.

13. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee is scheduled to take place on Monday, 10th May 2004.

14. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.15pm

R BLACKMAN
Chair

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