

MINUTES OF THE FORWARD PLAN SELECT COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 30th June 2004 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor R Blackman (Chair) and Councillors Dromey, Gladbaum, Kabir, Moher and Taylor.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Harrod.

1. Apologies for Absence

Members of the Select Committee discussed the implications of on-going absences at meetings by certain Members of the Select Committee and asked that attendance at meetings be recorded henceforth, detailing if apologies have been received in advance and listed against those items which were discussed.

2. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

There were none.

3. Deputations

There were none.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 1st June 2004

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 1st June 2004 be received and approved as an accurate record subject to the following amendment:-

- (i) that “of” be removed from the third line of Item 7, page 3, Chesterfield House –Floors 5 and 6.

5. Matters Arising

South Kilburn Masterplan and South Kilburn Masterplan – Effect of Impact Assessments

Councillor Gladbaum stressed the need for the protection of children’s recreational facilities and open spaces across the borough as part of future housing developments.

6. Call-in of Executive Decisions from the Meeting of the Executive on 24th May 2004

There were none.

7. **The Executive List of Decisions from the Meeting of the Executive on 14th June 2004**

RESOLVED:-

that the Executive's List of Decisions from its meeting on 14th June 2004 be noted.

8. **Briefing Notes requested by Select Committee arising from consideration of earlier versions of the Forward Plan (2003/04)**

Connexions Service

The Director of Education, Arts and Libraries advised the Select Committee that this item had been deferred to the Executive meeting in August due to a need to clarify details in the report. Members noted that the Connexions Service provided a range of career services and due to a restructure of the organisation the existing partnership would be disbanded. In line with the Children Bill, the service would now be delivered on a local authority basis rather than a pan-London basis. The Director outlined some of the legal complexities of the changes including the need to ensure that VAT liability did not fall on Brent. Members were advised that local management control would commence on 1st September 2004 once the service delivery and cost implications of the restructure had been fully assessed.

In response to questions, the Director explained that the Connexions Service would be more Brent focussed as a result of the restructure, although some informal partnerships and collaborations across London would continue if appropriate. Members were advised that a disruption of service was not anticipated and that the business plan would remain unchanged in the first year. Likewise, the transfer of staff would take place over a four month period and this was expected to be a smooth transition.

Proposal for Creating a New Voluntary Aided Islamic Primary School

The Director outlined the basis of the report which was scheduled to go to the Executive in September 2004 and highlighted some of the complexities regarding funding for the proposals. Members were advised that due to a number of financial constraints on the school a request had been submitted to the DfES for the school to be considered for exception status. If this were agreed by the DfES, no other schools would be financially disadvantaged. The Director confirmed that the deadline for the proposal was September 2004 and that the DfES had been pressed for a response so that consultation could be undertaken with the Schools Forum and agreement sought from the School Organisation Committee.

In response to questions, the Director confirmed that in excess of 250 pupils attended the school. He explained that Menorah High School was in a similar position and that the Council was waiting for a decision on both schools having made representations.

Schools Meal Contract

The Director of Education, Arts and Libraries advised Members that this report had been withdrawn as the majority of schools had decided to finalise their own school meal contracts with a variety of contractors. Members noted that provisions would be in place by the end of term. The Director confirmed that redundancies, redeployment and conditions of service for staff were all significant issues that had to be discussed between the chosen contractor and each school. Members were advised that whilst the Council had a general role in monitoring and supporting each school, contractual responsibilities ultimately lay with the school governing body. However, Members noted that the Council was offering legal advice to schools to ensure that the contracts were watertight, thus ensuring value for money.

In response to questions, the legal adviser to the Select Committee explained that a production kitchen would have a contract with the provider and the provider would then have individual contracts to all the separate schools. Members highlighted some concerns about the Council's liability in the arrangement of contracts.

Regarding hot/ cold food provision, some Members expressed concern about children not able to receive hot food, particularly for children who were disadvantaged. The Director explained that between 2 and 4 schools had been unable to negotiate good deals on hot food and that cold food provision was being considered as an alternative option. In response to a question from Councillor Gladbaum concerning a school's legal obligation to provide hot food, the legal adviser confirmed that whilst strict nutritional standards did have to apply, this did not mean that food had to be hot. Members noted that in schools where cold food was routinely provided, the response had been very positive. The Director confirmed that of those schools that had switched providers, the feedback had been positive although the situation would continue to be monitored. Members noted that whilst an in-house provision had been suggested by the unions and raised through discussions, this was not considered to be a viable option.

Councillor Kabir commented on the kitchen facilities at Grove Park and the necessary replacement of equipment which would ultimately have significant financial implications on a negotiated contract. The Director confirmed that equipment replacement costs would be included in the capital bid and should therefore be covered by the budget, if necessary.

Members requested an update to the Select Committee at its meeting in September 2004.

Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance Note

Ken Hullock (Team Manager, Policy and Research) outlined the details of the briefing note to the Select Committee and confirmed that the draft supplementary planning guidance note had been agreed by the Planning Committee for public consultation earlier in the year. This consultation concluded in April 2004 and the guidance would be revised taking into the public's comments. However, the Council was awaiting the circulation of new guidance from central Government (PPG 3) regarding affordable housing and delays to its availability meant that a revision of the guidance note was not anticipated before the end of 2004.

In response to a question concerning housing provision of 9,600 dwellings, Mr Hullock confirmed that this target was based on a London-wide capacity study that was conducted in 1998 and was deemed, at that time, to be a reasonable estimate of what could be delivered between 1997 and 2016. Members noted that need specific to Brent was above the target that was identified as a result of the Housing Needs Survey. He explained that the solution was to achieve as much housing as possible on sites and that the overall target was likely to be met.

Councillor Kabir referred to the draft guidance note and enquired as to how "quality environments" could be guaranteed in new developments. Mr Hullock explained that environmental standards had to be applied to all new build developments regarding issues such as parking, character of an area and density. He explained that educational, leisure and health facilities and the overall needs of residents were all important considerations for new developments. Members noted that large scale developments such as Quintain's redevelopment of Wembley were being phased over a long time.

Commenting on the provision of school places to match developments, Members were advised that the emphasis remained on providing housing to meet the need and that school places would have to be provided to meet the demand. Some Members highlighted additional issues such as providing suitable health facilities. Councillor Moher suggested that it would be beneficial to see how other boroughs were coping with housing demands and whether there were any alternative strategies for meeting the affordable housing target. Mr Hullock confirmed that a monitoring report would be produced later in the year to cover a range of planning issues to assess the effectiveness of policy including the provision of housing.

Councillor Taylor stressed earlier concerns about the provision of school places and health facilities for residents, including suitable hospital facilities as a significant longer term consideration. Councillor Dromey then commented on the lack of a holistic approach to housing development and suggested that a greater emphasis should be placed on combining services from the outset, and the development of the planning brief, to ensure a co-ordinated and complementary approach to new developments. Mr Hullock explained that a requirement for on-site facilities such as health and education provisions could be included in the guidance but that this was generally only applicable to large developments. He stressed further that these provisions were always taken into consideration regardless of whether they were mentioned specifically in the guidance. Whilst acknowledging these comments, Councillor Dromey stressed that when a number of smaller developments were combined, this could total a substantial number of units with similar implications.

Councillor Jones explained that the UDP would soon be replaced by a Local Development Framework. The Chair called for a more strategic approach to guidance on the provision of health, education, leisure and social services facilities by developers in order that the importance of suitable provisions be addressed from the outset, in lieu of financial payments. Mr Hullock explained the importance of ensuring that smaller scale developments were not constrained by the requirement to provide on-site health and education facilities and that the current practice of contributing towards facilities was very important. Councillor Kabir expressed some concerns about being so prescriptive in the guidance about on-site facilities but stressed the need to increase awareness about the wider implications of all housing developments to ensure that the most effective action was always taken.

Proposed Grant of Lease to Brent PCT Former Nurseries at Crouch Road, NW10

Member noted the briefing note and enquired as to whether planning approval had yet been sought for the above site. Councillor Kagan confirmed that planning approval for the site was being considered on that evening's Planning Committee agenda.

Forced Marriages

The Lead Member for Health and Social Care advised Members that the report had been deferred to September 2004.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the above briefing notes and information updates be noted;

- (ii) that an update on the issues identified through the discussion on the briefing note regarding the *Schools Meal Contract* be presented to the Select Committee at its meeting in September 2004; and
- (iii) that a more detailed information update on *Forced Marriages* be presented to the Select Committee at its meeting in August 2004.

9. **Information Update Requested by the Select Committee at its Meeting on 1st June 2004**

Transport Grants to Voluntary Organisations

Members received a verbal update from the Lead Member for Health and Social Care about Transport Grants to Voluntary Organisations, which had been discussed by the Select Committee on a number of occasions. Members acknowledged the Lead Members' apologies for not attending the meeting.

The Lead Member advised Members that since the issue had last been discussed by the Select Committee, a number of meetings had taken place with officers to look at the issues and identify any problem areas / action areas. Councillor Fox outlined the nature of the grant and the reasons for its allocation, explaining that the grant enabled voluntary organisations to cover the costs of transporting people who were entitled to transportation from Social Services. Members noted that in Brent, the grant was payable to those organisations where a person had substantial/critical needs.

Having outlined the review of the transport grant and the determination of criteria against which voluntary organisations and users were assessed, the Lead Member explained that people with needs that were not deemed to be substantial/ critical should be supported by alternative funds. Members noted that the grant had previously been paid on a historical basis which had not been a satisfactorily fair system. Consequently, a review was undertaken and criteria established to determine which organisations served substantial/ critical needs. The Lead Member explained that following the assessments, officers had worked closely with organisations to identify how alternative funding for services could be accessed, find alternative facilities and / or alternative transport arrangements.

Whilst acknowledging the Select Committee's earlier concerns about inaccuracies and anomalies in the report that was called-in after the meeting of the Executive on the 8th March 2004, the Lead Member confirmed that all organisations had been reassessed but no further organisations had been deemed eligible for the grant.

Councillor Fox then went on to outline some of the organisations that had applied for the grant and the services they provided.

The Chair commented on the Select Committee's earlier request for a revised report which clarified a number of anomalies and reiterated the request. He expressed concerns about smaller organisations undertaking vital work on behalf of the Council but being excluded from the grant despite their support for very needy people. Councillor Dromey reiterated his earlier concerns about the significance of form-filling techniques and how some organisations might be disadvantaged by the process. Councillor Kagan acknowledged these concerns and advised Members that the Voluntary Sector Team had been strengthened in order to support a move away from organisations from being dependent on the Council and to offer on-going technical and practical support. The Lead Member again stressed the need for criteria which could ensure that the service was targeted and fair. He also explained that not all organisations wanted assistance to identify alternative sources of funding and that this resistance remained an issue.

Councillor Gladbaum enquired about the status of the decision in light of the Select Committee's earlier recommendation and was advised that the original decision was taken by the Executive on 8th March 2004 but that payment of the grants had been deferred to the end of June 2004 so that further discussions could take place about the issues raised by the Select Committee.

The Chair stressed the need for accountability and transparency and requested that a detailed explanation about the criteria against which the organisations were assessed be provided to the Select Committee, clarifying those organisations which did/ did not meet the criteria and the reasons for this.

RECOMMENDED:-

- (i) that the update be noted; and
- (ii) that as a final request, a written report be circulated to the Select Committee, as previously requested, clarifying the criteria for allocation of transport grants and detailing the reasons why voluntary organisations had/ had not met the criteria for funding.

10. **The Forward Plan** (*Issue 2 2004/2005*)

After consideration of Issue 2 of the Forward Plan (05.07.04 to 05.11.04) by the Select Committee, Members requested further

information on the following issues to future meetings of the Forward Plan Select Committee:-

- (i) **Youth and Community Centres Review – Update**
Report deferred to the Executive meeting in July. Request for an information update/ briefing note to the meeting on 28th July 2004, outlining the key issues. Lead Member/ Lead Officer attendance at this meeting was requested;
- (ii) **Proposal for Creating a New Voluntary Aided Islamic Primary School**
Request for an update/ briefing note to the meeting in September outlining the key issues in report. Members also asked for an update on the Menorah School. Request for Lead Member and Lead Officer attendance at meeting in September;
- (iii) **Children Bill**
Request for a briefing note to the meeting on 28th July 2004 outlining the key issues in report. Request for Lead Member and Lead Officer attendance by both Social Services and Education. Request also that a representative from the PCT be invited to attend the meeting on 28th July 2004;
- (iv) **Connexions**
Members noted that this report had been deferred to the August meeting of the Executive as information from a neighbouring authority had not been made available. Request for a briefing note / update to the meeting on 28th July 2004 outlining the key issues in the report. Request for Lead Member and Lead Officer attendance at this meeting;
- (v) **Best Value Review of Sports Service**
Request for an information update to the meeting of the Select Committee on 28th July 2004. Lead Member and Lead Officer attendance at the July meeting requested.
- (vi) **Re-tendering of Parking Contracts**
Request for a briefing note on the main issues to the meeting on 31st August 2004. Lead Officer and Lead Member attendance at meeting requested.
- (vii) **Forced Marriages**
Request for a more detailed information update outlining the key issues in the report. Lead Member and Lead Officer attendance at meeting on 31st August 2004 requested;

- (viii) **Personalised Disabled Parking Spaces**
Request for a briefing note to the meeting on 28th July 2004. request for Lead Member and Lead Officer attendance at the meeting on 28th July 2004; and
- (ix) **Draft Air Quality Action Plan**
Following consideration of this item at an earlier meeting, the Select Committee requested a written update in advance of presentation to the Executive. Having been deferred to the September meeting of the Executive, a written update will go to the August meeting of the Select Committee. Lead Officer and Lead Member attendance at the meeting to be confirmed.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the above items be submitted for consideration by the Forward Plan Select Committee at its meeting on 28th July 2004 or future meetings thereafter.

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

The Best Value Performance Plan (draft).

RESOLVED:-

that Members note that this item was considered for reasons of urgency due to the requirement for approval by Full Council by the deadline of 30th June 2004.

12. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 28th September 2004.

13. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.35pm

R BLACKMAN
Chair

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