

MINUTES OF THE FORWARD PLAN SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 26th October 2004 at 7.40 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Dromey (Vice-Chair, in the Chair) and Councillors Gladbaum, Hughes and Moher.

Also present were Councillor Jones (Lead Member for Environment and Planning), Councillor Beswick (Lead Member for Community, Consultation and Public Safety) and Councillor Coughlin (Lead Member for Corporate Resources).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Blackman, Harrod and Taylor.

At this point Members of the Select Committee asked that their best wishes be forwarded on to Councillor Harrod following a recent accident.

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

There were none

2. Deputations

There were none

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 28th September 2004

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 28th September 2004 be received and approved as an accurate record, subject to the following amendment:-

- (i) In the last sentence of the first paragraph on page 5, which should read as “He confirmed that one of the options could be for a Cypriot youth group to be given control of the lease.”
- (ii) that it be recorded in the minutes that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Gladbaum.

4. Matters Arising

There were none

5. Call-in of Executive Decisions from the Meeting of the Executive on 11th October 2004

There were none at this meeting.

6. **The Executive List of Decisions from the Meeting of the Executive on 11th October 2004**

RESOLVED:-

that the Executive's List of Decisions from its meeting on 11th October 2004 be noted.

7. **Information Requested by the Select Committee arising from Consideration of Earlier Versions of the Forward Plan**

Draft Air Quality Action Plan (Verbal Update)

The Lead Member for Environment and Planning (Councillor Jones) and Yogini Patel (Environmental Services) were present at the meeting for this item.

Members of the Select Committee were reminded that having declared air quality management areas within Brent in April 2001, the Council was required to review air quality within the Borough and to ensure that air quality issues were adequately addressed. Following Stage 4 of an assessment the Council was subsequently required to produce an action plan to help achieve air quality objectives. Having received a briefing note on this item in April 2004 Members were reminded that the draft Air Quality Action Plan had been forwarded on to DEFRA and the GLA as well as other statutory bodies for consultation. In response DEFRA had sought further clarification regarding 63 action points that had been formulated. A subsequent report has to be forwarded on to DEFRA providing details of the proposed actions, their effectiveness in bringing about air quality improvements and their cost-effectiveness. Members noted that the GLA was now seeking comments on air quality issues regarding Neasden Goods Yard.

Yogini Patel (Environmental Services) advised Members of the Select Committee that there had been considerable delay to implementation of the Air Quality Action Plan as a result of the consultation process with DEFRA and the GLA. Recruitment difficulties within the Team had also affected production of the action plan. The Lead Member advised those present that a requirement to provide specific performance indicators, as outlined in DEFRA's guidance, had also delayed implementation of the Plan. Members noted that national and European guidelines had to be taken into consideration and that the action plan had to tie in to a number of policy documents such as the Local Implementation Plan. Consequently production of the action plan had been a complicated and timely process with the majority of local authorities finding it difficult to deliver the action points that were expected by DEFRA.

Members were advised that the Air Quality Action Plan had to be finalised by 10th December 2004 and would, thereafter be presented to the Executive in December 2004. Ms Patel advised those present that whilst concerns raised by Members at the last meeting regarding pollution along the North Circular Road was an important issue, ultimate responsibility lay with Transport for London (TfL). Members were advised that the Council would produce a progress report concerning the Action Plan on an annual basis to show progress regarding air quality issues in the Borough, but that these would have to focus on issues that could be addressed and influenced by the Council.

At this point Councillor Gladbaum expressed serious concerns regarding air quality problems along the North Circular Road and highlighted implications for the Borough whilst acknowledging the Council's remit. She highlighted the implications for the Borough and expressed concern that options for effectively dealing with air quality issues in this area were not being sought. Ms Patel advised Members that funding had been sought some time earlier to position new planting along the North Circular in order to "soak up" air pollution. Members were advised that Transport for London (TfL) welcomed the development of innovative schemes but rejected the proposal. It was important to note that adequate funding to undertake such schemes relied upon partnership working between TfL and the Council. Ms Patel stressed that such schemes may not necessarily lead to air quality improvements across the Borough and that the cost implications of such schemes also had to be taken into serious consideration. In response to some queries from Members of the Select Committee, Ms Patel confirmed that the Department had put proposals to TfL for a number of options for reducing air pollution such as green barriers and dead willow barriers. However, these had been rejected. On the whole it was widely accepted that there were few options available to local authorities. Councillor Moher referred to air pollution as a London-wide problem and suggested that cross-borough initiatives should be considered.

In response to a query from Councillor Gladbaum, Ms Patel confirmed that air quality levels were set by DEFRA in accordance with European targets. Members noted that nitrogen dioxide standards had to be met by the Council by 2005 and that the Council was currently a long way off meeting these standards. Members noted that the London Mayor was committed to lower emission zones but that a number of London authorities were struggling to meet the standards such as Hammersmith which had the highest pollutant exposure in London.

Ms Patel stressed the implications of the Action Plan for the local authority and highlighted the need for a range of transportation and environmental policy documents to complement one another to ensure that the impact of individual and collective plans could be successfully

evaluated in the future and effective outcomes determined. Members noted that at the current time there was little effective monitoring, recording or measuring of air quality and transportation issues across the Borough and that this made it impossible to evaluate the impact of any policies and plans. Whilst highlighting the environmental importance of such documents Ms Patel stressed the cost implications of implementing the action plan and the long term impact on businesses across the Borough.

Members of the Select Committee expressed considerable concern about the implications of the Air Quality Action Plan for the Borough in terms of environmental impact, cost implications and problems associated with achieving certain standards within specific timescales. Whilst Members acknowledged that the Air Quality Action Plan would be presented for consideration by the Executive in December 2004, Members stressed the need to ensure that ongoing work would be undertaken with regard to the action plan to identify effective ways to reduce air quality pollution across the Borough. It was felt that the impact of the Air Quality Action Plan on the Borough should be investigated further by a suitable Scrutiny Task Group, which should liaise with associated partners and agencies such as Transport for London (TfL) and consider air quality issues such as those affecting the North Circular Road.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the verbal update on the draft Air Quality Action Plan be noted; and
- (ii) that a request for a time limited investigation by the Quality of Life Scrutiny Panel into the impact and implementation of the Air Quality Action Plan in Brent be considered by The Management Board at its meeting on 1st December 2004.

Brent Crime Disorder and Misuse of Drugs Audit

The Lead Member for Community Consultation and Public Safety (Councillor Beswick) and Valerie Jones (Head of Community Safety) were both present for this item.

Councillor Beswick advised the Select Committee about the Brent Crime, Disorder and Misuse of Drugs Audit that was currently underway. He confirmed that a wide consultation was being undertaken with over 90,000 questionnaires circulated to local residents and all ward councillors asking them to comment on crime concerns and fears. Members noted that the Audit proposed four priorities including anti-social behaviour, property crime, violent crime and drug and alcohol abuse. Under these headings specific areas of

activity were proposed by the Council which, under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, has the authority and legal duty to consider implications for the crime and disorder reduction of any decision or action that it takes. The Lead Member advised the Select Committee that the audit and the resulting Crime Action Plan relied on partnership working between the Council and agencies including the Police and the Probation Service. He stressed that the audit was an important step in identifying ways to tackle crime related issues affecting local residents and to identify tangible outcomes. In response to a question the Lead Member confirmed that all data would be compiled on a Ward basis. He referred to the Safer Neighbourhood initiative and stressed that the scheme would be expanded across the Borough in priority areas as and when funding became available and that the next scheme would be implemented in Harlesden.

In response to a query from Councillor Dromey regarding ways in which to design crime out, Valerie Jones confirmed that there were a number of ways to do this but for it to be successful a comprehensive strategy was necessary. In response to a question from Councillor Dromey regarding the impact of crime reduction strategies, the Lead Member explained that success was not always easy to measure as outcomes were not always tangible. However, initiatives such as the use of dispersal notices and ASBOs had led to obvious reductions in crime across the Borough.

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note be noted.

One Stop Shop Annual Performance Report 2003.2004

Councillor Coughlin (Lead Member for Corporate Resources), Sandra Carson (Director, One Stop Shop Service) and Bernard Diamant (Director of Corporate Services) were present at the meeting for this item.

The Lead Member for Corporate Resources advised those present that the briefing note provided an overview of the One Stop Shop Service and of the key issues in a report which would be presented to the Executive in December 2004. The Lead Member referred to issues affecting the Service since 2003 such as the Benefits Service coming in-house in 2003/2004 and the move of the One Stop Shop from Kilburn Library to Dyne Road. Referring to average waiting times Councillor Coughlin stressed that waiting times had on average been reduced by three minutes in the majority of one stop shops across the Borough and that there had been an 11.9% increase in online enquiries to the One Stop Shop Service. He then commented on the extended service that had been provided on Saturday since June 2004 with an 8% increase in usage. Whilst customer satisfaction was recorded at

98%, Members acknowledged that this represented a 1% decrease since the previous year.

Sandra Carson (Director, One Stop Shop Service) advised those present that the report was produced on an annual basis and was very detailed due to the range of services that were provided. Those present were mindful of the close working relationship with other departments including the Revenues and Benefits Service and Brent Housing Partnership. Commenting on the positive improvements that had been made within the service, Sandra Carson referred to the robust plans that had been undertaken to improve call answering and response times in recent months, although further improvements would continue to be made. Members were advised that there had been a decrease in staff turnover which had enabled the service to look at improving efficiency and diversification.

In response to queries from some Members of the Select Committee regarding reduced hours of opening in Kingsbury, the Lead Member acknowledged that despite obvious improvements within the service a number of offices operated limited opening hours for a variety of reasons. He explained that demographics, staff resources and efficiency were all important considerations for determining opening hours and stressed that this was ultimately in response to demand for the services in certain offices. Whilst the standard of service being provided remained the priority consideration, members of the public were able to access information about Council services in a variety of ways such as by email or telephone. Ms Carson confirmed that in 2003/2004 Brent House one stop shop received over 53,000 enquiries, the Town Hall received 51,000 enquiries and Kingsbury received only 18,000 enquiries. Members noted that demand for these services would continue to be monitored as would the number of telephone and e-mail enquiries, especially in those areas where one stop shop opening hours had been reduced. Ms Carson confirmed that the Town Hall had the highest number of enquiries and therefore the longest waiting times.

Councillor Gladbaum enquired about staffing issues and was advised that all offices remained fully staffed at all times although this was often with the use of temporary staff. However, the importance of employing committed longer term staff had been acknowledged.

In response to a query from Councillor Dromey, Ms Carson confirmed that security guards had been employed in each of the one stop shops to prevent attacks against staff and that there had been a notable reduction in problems. Councillor Dromey stressed the importance of the face to face service for local residents across the Borough. Consequently it was felt that the Council should continue to invest as far as possible in the One Stop Shop Service. Councillor Gladbaum referred to the huge range of tasks that were undertaken by One Stop

Shop staff, some of which had previously been undertaken by Councillors.

At this point Bernard Diamant (Director of Corporate Services) advised Members that when assessing the performance of the One Stop Shop Service in 2003/2004 it was important to consider the quality of the Service's Management Team and the Council's overall accessibility as a result of the six one stop shops, the call centre and on-line facilities. The high level of support provided by the front line service ensured that all communities could readily access the Council.

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note be noted.

8. Briefing Notes, Information Updates Requested by the Select Committee following Consideration of Version 5 of the Forward Plan

Paul Daisley Hall Charges Increases

Councillor Coughlin (Lead Member for Corporate Services) and Bernard Diamant (Director of Corporate Services) were both present for this item.

Bernard Diamant (Director of Corporate Services) advised Members of the Select Committee that the Paul Daisley Hall offered a variety of discounts for voluntary sector and community groups of between 20-30%, depending on which day the venue was booked. Regarding the proposed 19% charges increase as detailed in the report to the Executive on 15th November 2004, Members were advised that the 19% increase would be applicable to all bookings but that the 20-30% reduction would continue to be offered to voluntary organisations. Block bookings by such organisations would also lead to a further reduction of approximately 10%.

Referring to the briefing note, Councillor Gladbaum expressed some concern that there would be a nominal investment of increased charges into the Hall itself and suggested that suitable monies should be invested due to the current state of the Hall. Bernard Diamant stressed that the briefing note was incorrect and confirmed that there would be a partial re-investment of the monies from the venue and also identified within the budget to ensure that necessary works could be undertaken in the future.

Bernard Diamant advised those present that operation of the Paul Daisley Hall had been brought back in-house to ensure that the Hall was protected as a viable venue for the public. He confirmed that

approximately £450,000 of capital investment had been spent between 1999 and 2004 on improvement works to the Hall including new lighting, the refurbishment of the toilet facilities, roof works and the installation of new curtains and decorations. Whilst acknowledging that the 19% rise was quite high, Mr Diamant stressed that such an increase was important to ensure that further work could be undertaken in the future such as the proposed refurbishment of the kitchens and a replacement of the electrics, all of which would enhance letting prospects. Members noted that £30,000 of letting costs was spent annually to ensure that basic maintenance work was undertaken.

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note be noted.

9. Civic Centre Project

Members were advised that the lead officer for this item had been unable to attend the meeting and that consequently there would not be an update. Members noted that the Lead Officer, Phil Newby would attend the next meeting of the Select Committee on the 17th November 2004, at which time he would respond to Members' questions. Members noted that the proposed report on the new Civic Centre for Brent would be considered by the Executive in December 2004 following a recent deferral of this item.

RESOLVED:-

that the Forward Plan Select Committee receive an update on the Civic Centre project at its meeting on 17th November 2004. Phil Newby and the relevant Lead Member were requested to attend the meeting to respond to queries.

10. The Forward Plan: Issues 5 and 6 2004/2005

Issue 5 (04/10/2004 to 04/02/2005) of the Forward Plan had previously been circulated to all Members of the Select Committee. Issue 6 of the Forward Plan (08/11/2004 to 04/03/2005) was now before Members of the Select Committee. Following consideration of these documents the Select Committee requested further information on the following issues.

Copland School – Sale of Land

Request for a briefing note to the November meeting with an update on the main issues to be contained within the report. The Lead Member and the relevant lead officer were requested to attend the meeting and respond to Members' questioning.

Civic Centre Project

Request for a further briefing note and also a verbal update to the November meeting following deferral of this item from the October meeting at the request of the lead officer. The Lead Member and lead officer requested to attend the meeting and respond to Members' questioning.

Revised Park Strategy for Brent 2004 to 2006 and the Development Plan for Allotments 2004 to 2008

Request for a briefing note to the November meeting on the main issues contained within the report. Members acknowledged that the full report would be going to the Executive in November and welcomed the full report if available. The Lead Member and the lead officer (Sean Faulkner) were requested to attend the November meeting and respond to Members' questioning.

Draft Air Quality Action Plan

Request for a further briefing note and written update to the November meeting about the plan and details of how comments from the Select Committee had been incorporated in the report to the Executive at the time of decision making in December 2004. There were no requests for either the Lead Member and/or the lead officer to attend the November meeting to respond to Members' questioning.

Public Toilet Strategy

Request for a briefing note to the November meeting to highlight the main issues and areas of consideration in the report which would be presented to the Executive in December 2004. The Lead Member and lead officer (Keith Balmer) were requested to attend the meeting and respond to Members' questioning.

Children and Young People's Local Preventative Strategy

Request for a briefing note to the November meeting highlighting the main issues contained in the report. Members acknowledged that this report was scheduled to go to the Executive in November and therefore acknowledged that the follow up report may be available by this time. The Lead Member and lead officer were requested to attend the meeting and respond to Members' questioning.

Adoption and Permanency Policy

Request for a briefing note to the November meeting highlighting the main issues to be contained in the report which was scheduled to go to the Executive in December 2004. The Lead Member and lead officer (Janet Palmer) were requested to attend the meeting and respond to Members' questioning.

Annual BHP Report

Members of the Select Committee requested that this item be considered at the November meeting, however they acknowledged that

this item fell within the remit of the Performance and Finance Select Committee and would, subject to consideration by The Management Board at its meeting on 1st December 2004, be placed for consideration on the work programme of the Performance and Finance Select Committee.

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

There were none

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee will take place on Wednesday, 17th November 2004.

13. Any Other Urgent Business

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm

W DROMEY
Vice-Chair in the Chair

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