

MINUTES OF THE FORWARD PLAN SELECT COMMITTEE
Wednesday, 17th November 2004 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor R Blackman (Chair), Councillor Dromey (Vice-Chair,) and Councillors Gladbaum, Hughes, Sengupta (alternate for Moher) and Taylor.

Also present was the Lead Member for Corporate Resources (Councillor Coughlin) and the Lead Member for Environment and Planning (Councillor Jones).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Harrod and Moher.

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

There were none.

2. Deputations

There were none.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 26th October 2004

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 26th October 2004 be received and approved as an accurate record, subject to the following amendment:-

that the second line in the first paragraph of item 10 The Forward Plan: Issues 5 and 6 2004/2005 be amended to read as follows:-

“Issue 6 of the Forward Plan (08/11/2004 to 04/03/2005) was now before Members of the Select Committee.”

4. Matters Arising

There were none.

5. Call-in of Executive Decisions from the Meeting of the Executive on 15th November 2004

Members of the Select Committee were advised that they would be notified in due course of any requests for call-in of Executive decisions arising from the Executive meeting on 15th November 2005. The deadline for call-in was Monday, 22nd November 2004.

6. **The Executive List of Decisions from the Meeting of the Executive on 15th November 2004**

Members noted that the list of decisions for the Executive meeting on 15th November 2004 would be circulated separately.

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

(i) ***Civic Centre Project***

The Lead Member for Corporate Resources and the Director of Policy and Regeneration were present for this item to respond to Members' questioning.

Phil Newby (Director of Policy and Regeneration Unit) provided Members of the Forward Plan Select Committee with a verbal update regarding the Civic Centre project which had arisen out of the Wembley Vision statement in 2001/2002. He explained that the focus was on giving local people a greater stake in the Wembley area by providing communities with a civic centre. Members noted that as part of the project two consultants had been employed by the Council to consider the feasibility of the project and to assess key options for furthering the project. Members were advised that Deloitte & Touché and Jonathan Edwards Consultants had agreed that a huge investment in the Council's portfolio would be necessary in the future. The Lead Member explained that £127m would be necessary to cover the costs of maintaining the existing portfolio and that consequently it was felt that such funding would be better spent on developing a new one-site civic centre. He stressed however that in order to successfully centralise the different service areas in the heart of the Wembley Redevelopment, the project depended on cross-party support. Commenting on the Gershon Review, Phil Newby advised Members that the Council would have to make 2.5% savings year on year in the future and that this was an important consideration.

The Chair referred to the report from Jonathan Edwards Consultants and enquired about references to five possible sites for future development of the civic centre. Phil Newby explained that this figure had since been reduced to three sites and explained that one site was set within the Quintain Development area (curtilage); the second site was on the Brent House site (re-provision) and thirdly an additional site within the Quintain holdings. Members were advised that the car park in Ealing Road and the site at Chesterfield House were no longer considered to be viable options. It was noted that the current

Town Hall site was not big enough and as the building was a Grade II listed building, this could therefore pose a number of problems for future development.

In referring to the Quintain site, the Chair queried whether the existing planning applications for the site contained provision for the future development of a civic centre. Phil Newby explained that the Phase 1 outline planning application had been passed and the Phase 2 application was anticipated in the near future, but that Quintain had increased its holdings. The Chair queried whether Section 106 funding would be negotiated with Quintain to ensure that the Council did not incur additional costs if a civic centre were developed on this site. Phil Newby explained that the Phase 2 planning application would include the Council's list of requirements to Quintain as part of any potential development. The Lead Member explained that there were a number of ways to ensure that the Council would not incur further costs in the future although no definite funding options had yet been agreed.

Councillor Gladbaum commented on the suitability of the Unisys buildings but was advised by the Lead Member that this site had not been deemed viable due to its location. Councillor Hughes then asked for assurances that the Council would not incur additional costs following the development of a new civic centre. Phil Newby explained that a successful development would rely on expert project management. In response to queries concerning the redevelopment of Wembley and how the proposed civic centre would fit into "the vision", Phil Newby explained that it was important to ensure that other projects were undertaken in addition to improving leisure and entertainment facilities in the Borough. He highlighted the need for further conferencing facilities within the Wembley area and explained that a new civic centre would be a unique way in which to contribute something different to the Wembley redevelopment. He commented further that such a development on Wembley High Road would also be a vital boost for the local economy. Councillor Hughes enquired about the cost of the consultants' reports. Phil Newby confirmed that he would provide this information separately to Members.

The Chair queried why there were now concerns about the future renewal of leases on existing properties. Robert Lee (Corporate Property) advised Members that rent values would increase following the redevelopment of Wembley and therefore rents were also likely to increase. He highlighted the significance of regeneration issues, the age of Council properties, the accumulative need to maintain properties and the resulting costs to the Council. The Chair commented on the

centralisation of service delivery from Wembley but enquired about access difficulties for those residents elsewhere in the Borough. The Lead Member explained that Council offices would where necessary remain in other locations across the Borough such as in various one stop shops. He explained that all back office work would potentially be consolidated in a central site for a more efficient way of working. Phil Newby advised Members that discussions were currently underway with two universities and also agencies such as the PCT who were keen to participate in the site redevelopment, although the emphasis would be on bringing complementary services together at a central location.

Councillor Gladbaum stressed the need for cross-party support for the project and explained that this would be a unique opportunity for Members to raise the profile of the Council. Councillor Hughes referred to the development of advanced communications and the use of improved IT systems across the Council and queried why all staff needed to be located in one central building. Whilst acknowledging the importance of IT, Phil Newby explained that integrated service delivery in such a way should lead to increased productivity as proven by organisations such as British Airways, Glaxo Smith Kline and the Treasury Department.

In response to a question from Councillor Dromey regarding the use of Brent House as a potential site for the project, Phil Newby explained that a good development proposal had been put forward by the landlord and that this option had to be seriously considered in terms of value for money. Councillor Taylor welcomed the project in terms of contributing to the overall regeneration of Wembley.

Commenting on the timescales for the project, Phil Newby explained that the report was scheduled to go the Executive on 13th December 2004, and approval would enable the project to be taken into more in depth negotiations regarding project management issues and the location of a viable site. The Lead Member explained that the procurement exercise was likely to last at least twelve to eighteen months. Consequently the project was a long term undertaking which required all party commitment. The Chair responded that all party commitment to the project required the inclusion of the opposition parties in discussions from the outset. The Lead Member explained that he was happy to meet with the opposition parties after the Executive meeting in December to ensure that the project was backed by all sides.

(ii) ***Draft Air Quality Action Plan***

Councillor Jones (Lead Member for Environment and Planning) was present at the meeting for this item to respond to Members' questioning.

The Lead Member advised those present that concerns had been raised at the previous meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee regarding the Neasden Waste Depot and a subsequent request forwarded to the Management Board for this item be placed on the scrutiny agenda. It was anticipated that subject to the Board's approval, this item would be placed on the agenda for the next meeting of the Quality of Life Scrutiny Panel in January with representatives from the Environment Agency invited to attend the meeting.

Members noted that this was a particularly complex issue involving different organisations and agencies but that a further report would be available early next year and Members would be kept updated.

8. **Briefing Notes, Information Updates Requested by the Select Committee following Consideration of Version 5 and Version 6 of the Forward Plan**

(i) ***Re-tendering of Leisure Management Contract – Draft Specification***

The Lead Member for Environment and Planning (Councillor Jones) and Sue Harper (Assistant Director, Environment) were present at the meeting to respond to Members' questioning.

Sue Harper (Assistant Director, Environment) advised Members that the existing leisure management contract had been undertaken for a seven-year period but would expire at the end of 2006. Members noted that a report would be presented to the Executive in January 2005 concerning the basic details of the tendering process such as the objectives for investment and funding as well as the specification for programming and pricing. Tenders would be invited and in autumn 2005 a report would be presented to the Executive seeking approval for the newly tendered contract to commence in April 2006. The Lead Member explained that it had been necessary to re-tender following a Best Value Review and an Audit Commission investigation which identified the need for a tighter specification to ensure adequate provision of leisure facilities across the Borough and to increase the number of service users.

The Chair enquired about the length of the proposed contract post-April 2006. Sue Harper explained that this would depend on the outcomes of condition surveys on various buildings which would determine what level of investment was necessary in the future. In response to queries concerning the Bridge Park and Willesden sites, the Lead Member explained that there were currently no plans to include these sites in the re-tendering process. Sue Harper advised Members that the Best Value Review had looked at including Bridge Park in the proposal but that this was not viable at the current time. Likewise the Sports Development Service would not be included in the contract and neither would the Willesden PFI as this was a contract in its own right.

In response to a query from Councillor Gladbaum regarding Leisure Connexion's performance and whether they were a suitable competitor in the tendering process, Sue Harper explained that a reasonable service was being provided although it was necessary to review and monitor service provision and satisfaction levels. Members noted that such monitoring work had not been undertaken in the past but that as a result of review mechanisms having been introduced, service improvements had been notable in recent months and Leisure Connexion represented a good competitor. Members noted that the current specification was out of date and did not reflect the Sports Strategy objectives. Councillor Taylor commented that some residents had notified him of improvements at the Vale Farm swimming pool in recent weeks following earlier complaints about cleanliness.

(ii) ***Copland School –Sale of Land***

Robert Lee (Corporate Property) was present for this item to respond to Members' questioning.

Robert Lee (Corporate Property) circulated a number of maps outlining the Copland site and then provided Members with a detailed explanation about the proposed Copland site development. Members noted that a report would be presented to the Executive in the New Year detailing the full proposals for development at the site. Members noted that the proposed development of a high-rise residential block would fund the development of the school and the provision of new facilities such as an all-weather pitch, a running track and improved drainage facilities.

Members were advised that the necessary property transactions would follow approval of the planning application by the

Planning Committee in the New Year. Robert Lee then commented on the implications of the transfer of land to St Joseph's Primary School as a result of the proposed development and how this would also affect St Elsley's Primary School. He also commented on the impact of the proposed development on other sites around Copland School including the Dennis Jackson Centre and the Wembley Centre and possible options for improving the existing facilities.

Responding to queries about the financial implications of the development for the Council and the school, Robert Lee explained that an independent financial assessment had been undertaken which confirmed that the development was unlikely to yield a surplus. In response to queries about the impact of future development on the adjoining schools, Robert Lee explained that the developer would be working to the considerate builder scheme to minimise disruption caused to the schools during term time.

The Chair enquired as to whether both schools would use the playing fields. Robert Lee explained that the proposal was for protocol to be developed so that all of the schools could share the playing fields and facilities. He explained that St Joseph's Infants and Junior Schools and Elsley School each enjoyed established rights to use the playing field and which were protected by covenants on Copland School's freehold land and through areas leased to the school.

Councillor Hughes expressed some concerns regarding transfers of land and changes of use following a redevelopment and queried how the Council would ensure that no radical change of planning would take place in the future with significant cost implications to the Council. Robert Lee explained that the Council had the benefit of restrictive covenants on Copland School's freehold playing field and retained ownership of two other areas leased to the School. Any agreement about land transactions would include provisions for sharing any surplus that might arise between the Council, Copland School and the developer. The District Valuer had acted for the School in negotiations with the developer and might be requested to assist the Council's negotiations similarly.

Responding to a question from Councillor Gladbaum concerning the areas of land around the Dennis Jackson Centre and the Wembley Centre, Robert Lee confirmed that these sites were owned freehold by the Council and in the case of the Dennis Jackson Centre, subject to a long lease. Councillor Gladbaum explained that both sites were in need of refurbishment and queried whether they would benefit from the development.

Robert Lee explained that the Dennis Jackson Centre was in a particularly bad state of disrepair and was unlikely to be involved in the redevelopment project. Members noted that the Wembley Centre provided the opportunity to have a multi-youth facility which could be used by schools and other community groups in the area. One option could be to sell the freehold to the Wembley Centre and for the Council to undertake a long lease so that funding could be re-channelled into improving the centre. Members noted that a significant amount of SRB funding had been spent at the Wembley Centre in recent years to install IT and gym facilities. However it was noted that the outside of the building required some attention.

Responding to a question from Councillor Dromey, Robert Lee explained that overage was common especially where a range of parties were involved in a development and working with common goals. He explained that it was in the Council's best interest to pursue the conclusion of this project. In response to queries regarding the market value of land for transfer, Robert Lee advised Members that negotiations were currently underway to ensure maximum returns for the Council as well as ensuring suitable provision and redevelopment of the sites for schools.

(iii) ***Revised Park Strategy for Brent 2004-2006 and a Development Plan for Allotments 2004/08***

Sue Harper and Councillor Jones (Lead Member for Environment and Planning) were present at the meeting for this item to respond to Members' questioning. Sue Harper expressed apologies for absence from Shaun Faulkner who was currently unwell.

Members there were then advised about the current strategy and advised that most of the actions identified in the strategy had been achieved. Sue Harper explained that a Cultural Services' review had been undertaken by the Audit Commission earlier in the year and had resulted in a revised strategy to show how the Council had progressed with its provision of Cultural Services. Members noted that the strategy was currently in draft format but that a summary document had been sent to all Councillors as part of the consultation process. This document was available on the website. Sue Harper explained that the recommendations in the Strategy were based around four key themes and based on the feedback that had been received from residents and service users on issues such as dog fouling, activities for young people in parks (facilities and events), and warden services in parks. Members noted that these were important areas that were being fed back into the strategy. The

Lead Member advised those present that the consultation period had concluded on the 16th November and that the results would show what people wanted from the parks in their areas across the Borough and how the service could be improved. Members were advised that a parks brochure was currently being prepared.

In response to a question from Councillor Gladbaum Sue Harper confirmed that the document was not about the Parks Service or the Parks Team but actually about what Brent's parks offered and how they could be improved. Members noted that this would involve other groups and/or associations that were interested in the development of open spaces across the Borough. Councillor Taylor commented on some residents' concerns in the Preston and Kenton areas regarding safety in parks and expressed support for the warden system.

(iv) ***Public Toilet Strategy***

Councillor Jones (Lead Member for Environment and Planning) and Neal St Lewis (Operations Manager, StreetScene) were present at the meeting for this item to respond to Members' questioning.

Neal St Lewis advised Members that the proposed report would not be going to the December meeting of the Executive due to problems with gathering information from neighbouring local authorities. Subsequently this had delayed the public consultation and the report was unlikely to be presented to the Executive until February 2005.

Members were advised about the Public Toilet Strategy which had been developed to address Brent's shortage of public toilets. With regards to short term solutions, Neal St Lewis advised Members that the focus would be on improving signage for toilet facilities around the Borough by displaying the nearest location of the nearest toilet facilities in a variety of more relevant languages. He explained that available funding would be used to undertake such short term measures. With regard to long term measures for addressing the shortage of public toilets, Members were advised that a public consultation exercise would be undertaken to identify areas for improvement. Consequently a questionnaire from the Public Toilet Association would be circulated around the Borough. Members noted that in line with Public Toilet Association standards Brent required 25 toilets within its boundaries.

In response to a query from the Chair concerning signage, Neal St Lewis confirmed that it was necessary to serve the needs of

all communities across the Borough so a range of languages would be used rather than just French or German. Councillor Hughes commented on the benefits of the public consultation exercise but highlighted the fact that a large number of residents would not have used a public toilet facility in the Borough. He explained that this was a cross-party issue and highlighted the need for joined up thinking regarding the provision of toilet facilities in Brent. Neal St Lewis explained that consultation would show what people really wanted, how good facilities currently were in Brent and how if necessary improvements could be made.

In response to questions regarding the impact of the Stadium development, the Lead Member explained that this was an important issue that had been taken into consideration. Councillor Blackman expressed concerns about the volume of people in the vicinity of the Stadium and queried whether there were sufficient toilet facilities in these areas.

Councillor Gladbaum queried whether advertising on toilet sites was the only option to fund the provision of additional toilets. The Lead Member explained that this was primarily a planning issue but that such funding was a successful way to increase provision. Responding to comments from Councillor Dromey, Neal St Lewis explained that he could provide further information on how many people were using public toilets and how much money the sites were generating. Councillor Hughes then commented on the example of exposed urinals in Westminster and queried whether Brent was considering such facilities. Neal St Lewis explained that he and other officers were scheduled to visit Westminster to investigate the options that were available to the Council. At this point the Lead Member advised the Select Committee that some sites would not be used in the future and that there was still work to be done with regards to removing outdated signage in certain areas.

(v) ***Children and Young People's Local Preventative Strategy***

The Lead Member for Health and Social Care (Councillor Fox) and Janet Palmer (Assistant Director, Social Services) were both present for this item to respond to Members' questioning.

The Lead Member advised Members that the report before them had been presented to the Executive on Monday, 15th November 2004 and the detailed recommendations agreed. Members noted that the Strategy had been agreed which provided co-ordination of prevention and early intervention for young people. Janet Palmer explained that prevention was a key principle in the Children Bill which had received Royal

Assent on Monday, 15th November 2004 and had since become the Children Act. Members were advised that agreement of the LPS was an important part of implementing the Act in Brent. Members noted that Brent had a very young population and therefore such mechanisms and safeguards were vital for the provision and delivery of services across the Borough.

Councillor Gladbaum welcomed the Strategy but expressed some concerns about details in the report which she felt failed to reflect the diversity and cultural make up of children across the Borough. Commenting on the number of strategies to reduce child poverty and the range of initiatives intended to minimize risks to children, Councillor Gladbaum expressed some concern that the accompanying report failed to adequately reflect the significance of cultural diversity and ethnicity for young children in Brent. Janet Palmer advised Members that the Strategy was had been developed to reflect the needs of all young people and therefore emphasised the importance of diversity, culture and ethnicity. Janet Palmer explained that the Strategy should speak for itself and reflect the needs of all communities. However, she urged Councillor Gladbaum to contact her as soon as possible if it was felt that the Strategy should be amended. At this point the Chair queried whether this item would be placed on the Work Programme for consideration by the Social Care Scrutiny Panel and asked that this recommendation be put before the Scrutiny Management Board if the item did not already feature on the Social Care Panel's Work Programme.

(vi) ***Adoption and Permanency Policy***

The Lead Member for Health and Social Care (Councillor Fox) and Janet Palmer (Assistant Director, Social Services) were both present for this item to respond to Members' questioning.

Members of the Select Committee were advised that the purpose of this report was to improve the practice of providing alternative families for Looked After Children. Members noted that the Government had set specific targets for Local Authorities in terms of achieving permanency through adoption and that this was a key performance indicator. Members were advised that adoption was not the only option for permanency and that Brent's focus was on achieving permanency through the most suitable option including placements with extended family members and long term fostering. However such a policy did not reflect the Government's focus and consequently the adoption target performance indicators had been the subject of lengthy of discussions.

Members noted that the policy would make a statement of intent of how the Council would improve services and also highlighted those services that were available and to whom. The Lead Member explained that the Department was doing well but that this was not necessarily reflected in the performance indicators as they failed to reflect the significant impact of diversity in the Borough. Janet Palmer confirmed that the principles behind the adoption and permanency policy applied to all children of any age.

In response to a query from the Chair, Janet Palmer confirmed that there were no artificial constraints on the age of potential adopters in Brent and that the Department was generally very flexible as the emphasis was on reflecting a child's needs. Members noted however that there were some realistic constraints on age although grandparents were regularly considered as suitable adopters and/or long term foster parents. Councillor Gladbaum explained that she served on the Council's Fostering Panel and expressed some concerns that Brent did not have enough foster parents. Janet Palmer confirmed that a separate action plan had been developed to address this issue but that the recruitment target for 2004 had been successfully achieved. Members were advised that a substantial amount of Council funding was spent on out of borough foster carers and therefore it was important to invest in the recruitment of in borough carers and reduce the costs of independent carers. Janet Palmer explained that an intensive foster carer scheme was underway for hard to place teenagers and that there was already a strategy to look at support for foster carers. A similar scheme would be implemented for children with disabilities.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the above briefing notes and/or information updates be noted; and
- (ii) that the Management Board be asked to consider a request by the Forward Plan Select Committee for the LPS to be placed on the Work Programme of the Social Care Scrutiny Panel, if not already included on the programme.

9. **The Forward Plan: Issues 6 and 7 2004/2005**

Issue 6 (08/11/2004 to 04/03/2005) of the Forward Plan was before Members of the Select Committee. Following consideration of this document, the Select Committee requested further information on the following issues.

(i) ***Dollis Hill House***

Request for a briefing note to the January meeting of the Select Committee. The Lead Member and lead officer were requested to attend the meeting and respond to Members' questioning.

(ii) ***Youth and Community Centres Update***

Request for a briefing note on this item at the January meeting of the Select Committee. The Lead Member and lead officer were requested to attend the meeting and respond to Members' questioning.

(iii) ***Salisbury Road***

Request for a briefing note to the January meeting of the Select Committee on the main issues contained within the report. The Lead Member and lead officer were requested to attend the meeting and respond to Members' questioning.

(iv) ***Corporate Quality Policy and Action Plan***

Request for a briefing note to the January meeting of the Select Committee on the main issues contained within the report. The Lead member and lead officer were requested to attend this meeting and respond to Members' questioning

Members of the Select Committee were advised that version 7 of the Forward Plan (06/12/2004 to 01/04/2005) would be published on Monday, 22nd November 2004 and circulated to all Members in due course. Members were asked to contact Democratic Services should they have any further requests for information updates and/or briefing notes for consideration at the January meeting of the Select Committee.

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

Members of the Select Committee were advised that an item on the proposed Settlement of High Court Litigation by Whitewater Leisure Management Limited and Marjess Limited regarding Brent Sports Centres had been considered by the Executive at its meeting on the 15th November 2004.

11. **Date of Next Meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the next meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee take place on Wednesday, 5th January 2005.

12. Any Other Urgent Business

There was none

The meeting ended at 9.50 pm

R BLACKMAN
Chair

Mins0405/scrutiny/ForPlan17nj