

**MINUTES OF THE FORWARD PLAN SELECT COMMITTEE**  
**Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2006 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor D Coughlin (Chair), Councillor Leaman (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Corcoran (alternate for Councillor Sneddon), Hirani (alternate for Councillor Jackson), J Long, Malik and Powney.

Also present was Councillor Fox.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sneddon.

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

There were none.

**2. Deputations**

There were none.

**3. Minutes of Last Meeting – 28<sup>th</sup> March 2006**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> , March 2006 be received and approved as an accurate record.

**4. Matters Arising**

There were none.

**5. Introduction to the work of the Select Committee**

Peter Goss (Democratic Services Manager) gave a brief outline of the role of the Select Committee, explaining that the Committee reviewed the Forward Plan, considered matters appearing on the Forward Plan, matters on any current or forthcoming agenda, and any matters called-in, as well as making recommendations to the Executive.

Members were advised of the various ways further information could be presented to the Committee and the role of Democratic Services in supporting the work of the Committee.

The Chair emphasised the importance of being selective in requesting further information on items in the Forward Plan to avoid over burdening the agenda for future meetings.

**6. Call-in of Executive Decisions from the Meeting of the Executive on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

The deadline for call-in of Executive decisions was Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2006. Upon the deadline the threshold for the number of requests necessary to trigger a call-in was met for the items shown below. The Executive reports concerning these items were before Members of the Select Committee and the relevant lead officers and Lead Members for each item had been requested to attend the meeting to respond to questions.

*Promoting Day Opportunities for Adults with Disabilities*

The decisions on this item had been called in for the following reason:

To ensure that there was no plan to cut services to vulnerable groups.

Martin Cheeseman (Director of Housing and Community Care) was present but Councillor Colwill (Lead Member for Adults, Health and Social Care) was unable to attend due to other official Council business.

Martin Cheeseman gave a brief outline of the report, explaining that the report covered issues concerning the need to promote day opportunities and modernise day services for people with mental health difficulties, physical and sensory disabilities and learning disabilities, and to change the current way of providing services within Community Care. It then explained the work already undertaken in different service areas, described current services and resources available as well as the options for further consultation. Martin Cheeseman explained that the Executive had agreed to undertake statutory consultation and that no final decisions on the options would be taken until the results of the consultation were known. However, he warned that the consultation could be contentious because it might reveal tensions between existing service users and new service users.

Members were advised that external day services were used by users with particular disabilities, who had specific requirements that could only be provided by external services. It was noted that the criteria did not look at who the service benefited, but the type of care the council was offering.

The Chair invited Councillor Fox to raise any questions. Members of the Committee and Councillor Fox acknowledged the need to review the service but expressed concerns that the administration might be anticipating the possibility of making savings which would disadvantage vulnerable groups. Martin Cheeseman replied that he could not predict what the outcome of the consultation would be but assured the meeting that there was no requirement to identify a level of savings arising from the review. He emphasised that the aim was to look at options that provided effective care, as well as improving the service. The options for further development were discussed, option four was explained in detail; a re-provision of in-house service with service users being offered direct payments or individual budgets to purchase or arrange their own requirements. Martin Cheeseman explained that the options put forward had to have regard to the current budget provision and that it was inevitable that needs and desires would have to be separated. Some people would have unrealistic expectations that could not be financially supported.

Councillor Fox stressed that political assurance was needed to confirm that these changes were made to improve the service and not to reduce costs.

In considering the information provided by the Director of Housing and Community Care in response to questions, Members remained cautious about the intended outcomes of the review and agreed to relay these concerns to the Executive.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that changes in service provisions should not be used as a cover for cuts in either spending or quality of service;
- (ii) the consultation should be genuine; and
- (iii) the Executive be asked to maintain and improve the quality of service for all users and carers.

#### *Revenue Budget 2006/07 Monitoring Report*

The decisions on this item had been called in for the following reason:  
To discuss proposed cuts and increases in charges.

Duncan McLeod (Director of Finance and Corporate Resources) was present but Councillor Blackman (Lead Member for Corporate Resources) was not present.

Duncan McLeod gave an introduction to the report, explaining that it provided an up-date on the 2006/07 budget position, including actions that were taken to address forecast budget overspends in the current year. Overall, the forecasts in the report, together with actions set out, would reduce general balances held by the council to £6.3m at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007.

Members were advised that even after taking the actions, there was a budget shortfall of £3.4m in the current year. The level of balances at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006 of £9.7M meant that a shortfall of this level was manageable but would leave balances forecast at £6.7M which was lower than desirable. It represented an underlying budget imbalance that would need to be addressed going into the next financial year. There had been a significant increase in the forecast overspend for various services. It was noted that an increased number of looked after children in residential and foster care was the reason for the overspend in the children in care area. Actions were being taken to contain the forecasted overspend, such as moving children in care who were over 18 into housing of their own, a review of housing benefit income for children in care and a review of high cost placements.

Environment and Culture was forecasted to overspend by £835k which was below the £1.134M forecast in the July monitoring report. It was explained that the overspend was the result of additional spending on electricity costs for street lighting, the extended opening hours of libraries, and reduced income

because of the lack of demand for CDs and DVDs from libraries, as well as the on-going cost of severance costs from management restructuring in 2005.

The Housing and Community Care forecast overspend stood at £3.4M arising from overspends for adult social care. This had been partially offset by a forecast underspend on the temporary accommodation budget of £0.2M. Actions were being taken within the service area to achieve savings of at least £1.1M. The main reasons for the overspends were the continuing impact of the overspend from the previous year, continuing demographic pressures and the impact of Primary Care Trust (PCT) budget restrictions.

It was noted that the report had asked the Executive to agree a package of savings that would achieve 2% reductions in budgets across service areas in 2007/08 and that where possible these would be brought forward to the current financial year in order to be sure they had a full year impact in 2007/08. It was likely that further savings would have to be considered as part of the on-going process.

Members enquired what other efficiency savings were being identified to bring them up to the 2% target. Duncan McLeod advised Members that savings had been identified, and that each service area had been given a set savings target but some still had to reach the target. It was confirmed that in the case of meals on wheels, savings had been made by changing the way meals were cooked and delivered.

Members were advised that the Executive had not accepted a package of savings for the Youth Service and instead had asked for a further review of the service. It would need another decision of the Executive before savings from this area were agreed. With regards to any proposed changes to charges for parking, Duncan McLeod advised that consultation would need to be carried out before any change could take place, however it was stressed that to avoid loss of income it was imperative that decisions needed to be made earlier rather than later.

Members were advised on the balance of targets and the opinions of the external auditors. It was noted that the Council's external auditors encouraged yearly increases in balances in view of the budget pressures the Council faced. Last year they had recommended balances of at least £8M and so it could be anticipated that next year they should be higher.

In answer to a question about the adequacy of the population statistics used by the Government, Duncan McLeod stated that it had been acknowledged that they were not perfect but were the best that could be used. The most recent statistics showed an increase in Brent's population but this would not be in time to affect next years settlement. The Council continued to lobby the Government on this matter as much as it was able to.

In response to a question about the Council Tax collection rate, Duncan McLeod accepted that more could be collected but pointed out that there had been year on year improvements and the Council had good working relations

with the contractor in seeking to maximise collection rates. Duncan McLeod reported on the exercise undertaken earlier in the year when all those in receipt of the single person occupancy discount were written to seeking confirmation of their entitlement. They had been given two months to confirm their entitlement before being removed from the list. This had resulted in stopping the discount for approximately 1,600 people.

With regard to the setting of the Council Tax next year, Duncan McLeod stated that at this stage a number of options had been put forward. It was confirmed that growth proposals had not yet been factored in

Members were also informed that limited growth in government funding and restrictions on Council Tax increases added pressure on resources for future years.

Members were advised that an updated report would be presented to the Executive in November but in the meantime wished to pass on their concerns to the Executive.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that all frontline service savings be consulted on with relevant service users before being extracted, and their implications for users fully set out and reported back to the Executive;
- (ii) that the charging of day care and transport for clients be rescinded along with increased parking charges;
- (iii) that reviews of youth services growth, Brent Crossroads and allocation of voluntary sector grants should not lead to a cut of funding, ending of provision or diminution of services.

**7. The Executive List of Decisions for the Meeting that took place on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2006**

RESOLVED:-

that the Executive List of Decisions for the meeting that took place on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2006 be noted.

**8. The Forward Plan (*Issue 5 2006/2007*)**

Issue 5 of the Forward Plan (09/10/06 to 09/02/07) was now before Members of the Select Committee. Following consideration of Issue 5 of the Forward Plan, the Select Committee made the following requests:-

***A Business Case for a new Civic Centre***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item. This briefing note was requested to the meeting of the Select Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2006. The relevant Lead Member and Lead Officer were not requested to

attend this meeting and respond to Members' questions, subject to the level of detail contained in the briefing note.

### ***IT Strategy 2006***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item outlining the savings implications and implications the IT Strategy would have on the budget. This briefing note was requested to the meeting of the Select Committee either on 25<sup>th</sup> October or 17<sup>th</sup> November 2006. The relevant Lead Member and Lead Officer were not requested to attend this meeting and respond to Members' questions, subject to the level of detail contained in the briefing note.

### ***Wembley Security Proposals***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item providing an update on the current situation and why it had been delayed reporting to the Executive. This briefing note was requested to the meeting of the Select Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2006. The relevant Lead Member and Lead Officer were not requested to attend this meeting and respond to Members' questions, subject to the level of detail contained in the briefing note.

### ***Draft Parking and Enforcement Plan (PEP)***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item, specifically providing an explanation for why it had been delayed reporting to the Executive and how it was proposed to use the results of consultation carried out in May 2005. This briefing note was requested to the meeting of the Select Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2006. The relevant Lead Member and Lead Officer were not requested to attend this meeting and respond to Members' questions, subject to the level of detail contained in the briefing note.

### ***Air Quality Management Area Review***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item providing an update on the current situation and covering why Wembley air quality is monitored under different arrangements to the rest of the borough.. This briefing note was requested to the meeting of the Select Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2006. The relevant Lead Member and Lead Officer were not requested to attend this meeting and respond to Members' questions, subject to the level of detail contained in the briefing note.

### ***Barham Park Estate Redevelopment Options***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item outlining the cost implications to Brent Housing Partnership and the Council of the delay in proceeding with the redevelopment of the estate. This briefing note was requested to the meeting of the Select Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2006. The relevant Lead Member and Lead Officer were not requested to attend this

meeting and respond to Members' questions, subject to the level of detail contained in the briefing note.

RESOLVED:-

that the above requests be noted.

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

There were none.

10. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2006

11. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm

D Coughlin  
Chair