

**MINUTES OF THE FORWARD PLAN SELECT COMMITTEE**  
**Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2007 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Coughlin (Chair) and Councillors Jackson, Kansagra, J Long, Malik, Powney and Shah.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Leaman.

Also present were Councillors Allie, Arnold, Colwill, Fox, Jones, Mistry, Thomas and Van Colle.

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

Councillor J Long declared a personal interest in the call-in of the Future of Customer Contact, item 5, given that she was a Director of the Brent Housing Partnership (BHP).

Councillor Malik declared a personal interest in the call of the Future of Customer Contact, item 5, given that he was a Director of The Brent Housing Partnership and a member of the South Kilburn Project Steering Group.

**2. Deputations**

Mary Turner (GMB) and additional representatives made a deputation which is recorded under item 6.

**3. Minutes of Last Meeting – 31<sup>st</sup> January 2007**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2007 be received and approved as an accurate record.

**4. Matters Arising**

None.

**5. Call-in of Executive Decisions from the meeting of the Executive on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2007**

**(a) Future of Customer Contact**

Following a request from the Committee at the previous meeting, Councillor Allie, Martin Cheeseman (Director of Housing and Community Care) and Sandra Carson (Assistant Director of Customer Services) attended to update and answer any queries Members had on the report.

Martin Cheeseman (Director of Housing and Community Care) introduced the 'Future of Customer Contact' report. It was noted that a key priority for the One Stop Service in 2006/7 was working to develop recommendations for the future of customer contact to enable the Council to maintain and improve its high standard of customer service whilst operating within budgetary

constraints. The report set out the strategy showing how the One Stop Service could be modernised and redesigned to provide more cost-effective customer contact arrangements. It presented a vision of the future of customer contact not only in the One Stop Service, but across the Council.

A number of initiatives were identified which would lead to reduced costs, improved efficiency and better customer service. These were evaluated against identified savings. The conclusion was to replace five One Stop Shop local offices with 'customer contact points'. The contact points would be smaller than existing One Stop Shop local offices and would share a reception and reception duties with a range of partners such as libraries. Additionally, they would have an appointment system that could be used by reception staff, the Council's telephone/on-line centre or by customers themselves. It was noted that interview facilities would be staffed by a rota of experienced customer services officers. Reception staff would encourage customers to use the self-service facilities, which included the internet and touch screen service points.

Members acknowledged that modernisation was needed to meet the demands of the local community. Surveys showed that the preferable method of contact had changed from face to face to electronic, such as the use of the internet, self service machines and the telephone.

Sandra Carson (Assistant Director of Customer Services) provided a detailed briefing on the background of One Stop Shop. It was noted that Brent was one of the first London Boroughs to establish the One Stop Shop and one of the first to establish a call centre. The One Stop Shop Customer service could not continue to be delivered in its current form as ongoing efficiency savings would result in aspects of the service being withdrawn and service standards being reduced considerably. The service required either an injection of funds to maintain the status quo or a major redesign to modernise and meet budgetary constraints and savings targets.

It was stressed that the results of a major study undertaken by the One Stop Shop Service, in the period April to November 2006 emphasised the need for 'channel migration' - moving customers from face-to-face to telephone contact and from telephone to on-line or email access.

Members were informed that a partnership had recently been formed with Tricycle Theatre in Kilburn. For an interim period of six months the Tricycle Theatre had agreed to provide floor space to set up self service kiosks that would be available to the public two days a week.

Councillor Allie confirmed his support for the aims set out in the report. He also stated that One Stop Shops were inherited from the previous Administration and that the Executive felt it had to ensure that the services delivered were efficient.

Members enquired whether the Council's policy had changed since last November, and whether the closure of the Kilburn One Stop Shop on Dyne Road was to save money due to the departure of Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) from the building rather than providing efficient services to the public.

Members also questioned whether any consultation had taken place and expressed concerns that officers and the Executive were unaware of the welfare benefits service provided to vulnerable people at the Kilburn One Stop Shop.

In response, Councillor Allie explained that there not been a change in Council policy. He stressed that a modernisation of services was taking place.

Sandra Carson explained that as trends moved towards greater telephone and e-mail contact, an improved use of technology would result in better access to information and its application by staff. Local services would be designed to meet the needs of vulnerable customers with complex queries. It was noted that the results of the consultation conducted between May-October 2006 showed that across 24 Council receptions during June & July 2006 90% of all customer visits were made to One Stop Shop Local offices, Mahatma Gandhi House and Chesterfield House. Analysis showed that 25 per cent of respondents had simple enquiries with no supporting paperwork and no special needs. This supported the case for further process review work, which would reduce the need for customers to have to visit the Council with paperwork. An Impact Needs Requirements Assessment had been conducted to identify any groups that could be adversely affected and the findings would be included in implementation plans to ensure customer needs were met through a local dedicated appointment service.

It was explained that the cessation of the welfare benefits service was required to consolidate the benefit advice resources within Housing and Community Care and other departments, such as Children and Families and the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP). This, it was proposed, would create a better use of resources dedicated to work for its client base. At present the Council targeted advice to tenants with rent arrears, people experiencing difficulty paying Council Tax and clients who needed to assess care packages. It was noted that a new report with recommendations as to how the Council could develop an overall debt policy and improve its approach to debt management would be produced in the summer.

Members stressed that there was a demand for advice from Kilburn One Stop Shop. Councillor Allie stated that Kilburn residents would still have access to services at Willesden, the Town Hall and the Tricycle Theatre.

Sandra Carson explained that as the agreement between the Council and Tricycle Theatre had been reached recently, further information relating to this section of the report was not yet available.

It was questioned whether there was a firm commitment from the Tricycle Theatre. Questions were also raised about IT services being implemented and whether cooperation with Camden Council had been considered as part of Kilburn was governed by them.

In response, it was noted that an agreement to maintain local presence and provide an appointment service had been made with Tricycle Theatre. The Ancient Order of Foresters' Meeting Room would be used for appointments and there would be potential to share reception and facilities for customers,

although further discussions and negotiations would take place to establish a permanent presence of a 'customer contact point'. Once agreed, further consultation regarding the implementation of facilities at the Tricycle Theatre would be conducted. Longer term plans included separate consideration of a South Kilburn One Stop Shop service. Martin Cheeseman added that at the moment combining the services with Camden Council would cause significant difficulties due to the complex nature of the different demands made by residents from each borough.

It was questioned whether there was a conflict of interest between Brent and Tricycle Theatre, as Brent funded Tricycle Theatre. Debra Norman (Deputy Borough Solicitor) stated that there would be no conflict of interest as the Council could have one or more relationships with any one organisation at a time.

Members acknowledged that there was a requirement for improvement and modernisation to the service. However, concerns were expressed for vulnerable people who might have difficulty in accessing the new service. It was stated that the Council should consider providing support to independent advice services if they were to reduce One Stop Shop services. Members enquired how the verification of benefit documents would be processed if the service was reduced.

In reply, Ms Carson advised members that telephone lines at the Tricycle Theatre and within the libraries would be a free service. Members of staff would also act as 'floor-walkers' to discuss the customers' needs, whether telephone or on-line contact would have advantages for them and would encourage usage of the system.

Members stated that the Best Service Review in 2000 commended the One Stop Shop as the best service providers. It was acknowledged however, that the One Stop Shop needed to adapt and change with social trends. Members stated that Kilburn was the third busiest One Stop Shop and it had surpassed all its targets. The recent review suggested that there was no evidence that showed the One Stop Shop services were not in use; in fact evidence showed that welfare benefit officers were required. Some members expressed the view that full consultation had not taken place. Residents had only been consulted upon the various methods of customer contact but not upon the closure of the Kilburn One Stop Shop or Kingsbury library. Members stressed that if Kingsbury library was moved from Stag Lane to Kingsbury High Road, public attendance at the library would decline. Members questioned the motive of the Executive behind the move as the lease for Kingsbury library would not end until 2030. Members expressed great concern that residents of Kingsbury ward had not been consulted upon the closure and relocation of Kingsbury library and may be extremely dissatisfied with the decision.

In response, it was noted that Kingsbury library currently shared the premises with one of the Pupil Referral Units and that the library was set back from the road. Councillor Van Colle stated that the current performance at Kingsbury library was average, and that it came 7<sup>th</sup> out of 12 libraries in terms of number of visits between April 2006 and November 2006, with visits declining in comparison to 2005/6. It was stressed that improvements would be unlikely

due to the poor location and the lack of passing trade. The library would also need extensive repair, which was estimated at £126,000 in the latest asset review by Corporate Property. It was proposed that combining the library and the One Stop Shop in Kingsbury would benefit residents and attract more customers. Although it would be smaller than the current Kingsbury library it would accommodate a modern and attractive library space, including the latest Information and Communication Technology for customers.

Officers noted that the library would provide a model for the future of Brent libraries and would be used to pilot the delivery of modern library services in Brent with self-service points, floor-walking staff, a joint reception with the customer contact staff and a bookshop-style display of stock. Given the good location it would be much more accessible. The library opening hours would be reviewed as part of the process of relocation. The local office would close in February 2007 and the new library/customer contact point would open in September 2007. It was suggested it would be an invaluable pilot to prove the business case for further investment and to help refine the design of subsequent customer contact points, as well as providing long-term savings.

Members in response, stressed that the percentage of visits and the net income of Kingsbury library were higher than Harlesden library. In response, Councillor Van Colle stated that current pressures faced from Central Government to modernise, save and restructure how and where services were provided had been one reason behind the relocation. He emphasised that the current Administration was very proud of the One Stop Shop and libraries within the borough and stated that the relocation of Kingsbury library would benefit many residents.

The Chair summarised the points made and concerns raised regarding One Stop Shop and libraries. The Chair strongly expressed the view that it would be a sham consultation if full consultation was made after the closure of the library. The Chair then commented that the reason to close the Kilburn One Stop Shop and Kingsbury library was based upon cost savings rather than customer focus. He also raised the point that the proposal to relocate the Kingsbury library had been suggested by the previous Administration but had been rejected by officers as impracticable as Kingsbury OSS would be too small for a library amongst other reasons. Furthermore, the previous Administration's proposal to consolidate welfare benefits advice was similarly opposed by officers at that time as impracticable and strongly resisted.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) that the Executive consider phasing changes to all One Stop Shop operations over a longer time frame to ensure:
  - (a) that adequate customer consultation be conducted;
  - (b) a measured pace for the introduction and use of new technology; and
  - (c) that staff receive training to advise on the use of services.
- (ii) that the Executive abandon the cessation of the Welfare Benefits Take Up Service, explore the impact this has on vulnerable

residents within the borough and how the service would be improved.

- (iii) that the Executive revise the closure of the Kilburn and Kingsbury One Stop Shop and ensure that adequate service arrangements are in place.
- (iv) that the Director of Environment and Cultural Services be instructed to conduct a full consultation with residents before the closure of Kingsbury library.

**(b) Authority to invite tenders for Meals Service Contract.**

Following a request from the Committee at the previous meeting, Councillor Colwill, Martin Cheeseman (Director of Housing and Community Care) and Ros Howard (Head of Older Peoples Services) attended to update and answer any queries Members had on the report.

Mary Turner, General Municipal & Boilermakers' Union (GMB) was given the opportunity to express concerns raised by customers and staff. She advised that she had in her possession a monitoring report that outlined the results of the two pilot schemes that had been conducted. Ms Turner stated that she believed this report had not been made available to members of the Executive or members of the public, and that if had been, the Executive would not have considered the 'cook on route' scheme. The report stated that 700 meals were served per day, that meals arrived in unacceptable conditions and that they were in breach of the Food Standards Agency's requirements. The view was expressed by Ms Turner that drivers could not monitor the meals and drive at the same time. Ms Turner also reported that drivers under the new scheme were unwilling to aid customers when delivering the food and furthermore, that when the vans were inspected they had been found to be lacking in hygiene. Members heard that those whom Ms Turner represented had expressed significant concerns regarding the cook-on-route scheme, including whether adequate consultation and research into the scheme had taken place.

Martin Cheeseman (Director of Housing and Community Care), advised that the report outlined the future provision of a meals service using the cook on route method which differed from the traditional system of central production and delivery in insulated containers in that individual choices of meals would be loaded frozen into specialist vehicles and reheated during the delivery journey. The Executive had approved a pilot trail of cook-on-route service.

Officers explained that the current method of production had been used for over 20 years, was now less cost effective and offered a restricted choice for service users. The types of meals delivered were Standard (English), Asian Halal, Asian Vegetarian, Caribbean and Kosher. Meals were provided to house-bound service users, day centres and Luncheon Clubs. The current trend of produced and delivered welfare meals had moved from the system described above to a 'cook on route' method which, the Committee heard, offered greater choice of food for users, hotter meals at the point of delivery, improved nutritional value of food delivered along with more efficient use of

resources. The meals service currently produces 151,000 meals per year to all categories of service users.

Ros Howard (Head of Older Peoples Services) responded to Members' questions regarding the consultation period and explained that during the period of September and October 2006, a pilot was conducted over a period of two weeks, with two leading suppliers in the cook-on-route field. Around 100 service users were surveyed, using supplier A and B. Overall there were no detrimental failures over the period, and the meals arrived hotter, with a slight improved service on the delivery, although lids of the dish were slightly lifted. The choice menu system was not tested at this stage. Officers acknowledged that there were some concerns with regard to hygiene and stated that these would be taken on board when evaluating the tenders.

Members discussed this information and expressed concern regarding the quality of food that would be delivered. Some members commented that whilst there was a need for financial savings, the quality of food should not be compromised. They enquired whether Halal, Kosher and other faith foods would be provided and how the spillage of food would be prevented to avoid contamination. Members also asked whether, if food was to be cooked on route, what procedures or guidelines would be made available to drivers in traffic jams or arrived early at their destination.

In reply, Ms Howard explained that the food would be purchased from a range of specialist providers, including certified kosher food. Tender specifications would address issues such as food spillage and temperature of the food. The contractor would have to show that they could provide the service required. All aspects from loading to delivery would be monitored by the Council. Ms Howard explained that the results from the pilot conducted showed that due to the superior system of choice, service users would be able to choose from a wide choice of up to 35 main meals, including vegetarian, along with a wider selection of deserts. The range of meals would continue to cater for the cultural requirements of all existing service users, and would meet demand for other cultural meals such as Polish, Chinese, and Somalian meals. This would be in line with Department of Health's "Our Health, Our Care, Our Say" guidance, which directed services to provide more choice for users. The Committee was advised that meals delivered in this manner were hotter, as the cook-on route model reheated the food on route to the service user in the vehicles and did not rely on pre-heated insulated hot-boxes which lost heat on route. In response to questions from members about the quality of the food delivered, it was explained that food was maintained at an optimum temperature above the danger zone of 63°C, that the nutritional value of the meals was enhanced and that the food's texture and colour was improved, as the reheating process was reduced.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) that Executive take into consideration the monitoring report cited by Mary Turner (GMB) at this meeting;

- (ii) that the Executive instruct the Director of Community Care to conduct adequate and thorough consultation with Local Authorities who had implemented the meals on wheels system;
- (iii) that the Executive outline:
  - (a) how temperature of the food would be measured and maintained;
  - (b) whether drivers would aid clients when required as stated in the previous scheme.
- (iv) that the Executive explain the impact of the scheme on existing transport and kitchen staff.

**6. The Executive List of Decisions for the meeting that took place on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2007**

RESOLVED:-

that the Executive List of Decisions for the meeting that took place on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2007 be noted.

**7. Briefing notes/information updates requested by the Select Committee following consideration of Version 9 (2006/07) of the Forward Plan**

***(i) Local Development Framework – Joint Waste Development Plan Document***

RESOLVED:

that the briefing note be noted and that the relevant lead member and lead officer be requested to attend the meeting of Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> March and respond to members' questions.

***(ii) Proposal for a borough-wide Dog Control Order***

RESOLVED:

that the briefing note be noted.

***(iii) The Draft Library Strategy***

RESOLVED:

that the briefing note be noted.

***(iv) Church End Redevelopment***

RESOLVED:

that the briefing note be noted.



**(v) Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)**

RESOLVED:

that the briefing note be noted.

**(vi) Future redesign of the Customer Contact arrangements**

RESOLVED:

that the briefing note be noted.

**(vii) South Kilburn – Granville New Homes**

RESOLVED:

that the briefing note be noted and that the relevant lead member and lead officer be requested to attend the meeting of Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> March and respond to members' questions.

**8. The Forward Plan (Issue 10 05/03/2007 – 06/07/2007)**

Issue 10 of the Forward Plan (05/03/2007 – 06/07/2007) was now before members of the Select Committee. Following consideration of Issue 10 of the Forward Plan, the Select Committee made the following requests:-

***The Single Equality Scheme***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item. This briefing note was requested for the meeting of the Select Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007. 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.

***Cultural Safety Update***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item. This briefing note was requested for the meeting of the Select Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007. 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. This briefing note was requested for the meeting of the Select Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007. 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.

### ***Feedback on the Current Tree Policy***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item. This briefing note was requested for the meeting of the Select Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007. 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.

### ***Brent Council's Green Travel Plan***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item. This briefing note was requested for the meeting of the Select Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007. 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**

Members were advised that the following aspect of a report had not been included on issue 9 of the Forward Plan for the appropriate date but was circulated 5 clear days before the meeting, and was considered at the meeting of the Executive on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2007:

*Report from the Director of Environment and Culture*

- **Queens Park Station Area Supplementary Planning Document – Approval for Adoption**

RESOLVED:-

that the above item be noted.

### **10. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee is scheduled to take place on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007.

### **11. Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

The meeting ended at 11.00pm.

Cllr David Coughlin  
**Chair**