

**MINUTES OF THE FORWARD PLAN SELECT COMMITTEE**  
**Wednesday, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Long (Chair) and Councillors V Brown, Jones (alternate for Councillor Coughlin), Mistry, H B Patel, Powney and Tancred.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Castle and Coughlin.

Councillor Allie (Lead Member for Housing and Customer Services) also attended the meeting.

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

The Chair declared a personal interest as a member of the Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) Board and Fortunegate Housing Board. However, she did not regard this interest as prejudicial and remained present for the duration of the meeting. Councillor Mistry declared a personal interest as a member of Stadium Housing Association Board, however she did not regard this interest as prejudicial and remained present for the duration of the meeting.

**2. Minutes of Last Meeting – 4<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2009 be received and approved as an accurate record.

**3. Matters Arising**

None.

**4. Call-in of the Executive Decisions from the meeting of the Executive held on Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

*(i) Housing Strategy 2009-14*

Martin Cheeseman (Director of Housing and Community Care) introduced the report and addressed the reasons provided for the call-in of the decisions. With regard to the assertion that there was insufficient consultation with stakeholders, Martin Cheeseman stated that there was a clear consultation strategy which involved a wide range of stakeholders, the 3 major political groups and tenants. Members then heard details of the various consultation exercises undertaken, which included 4 major workshop sessions, 1 in November 2008, 2 in December 2008 and 1 in January 2009, each focusing on different aspects of the strategy. The last workshop had attracted a large audience from service users and comments from these workshops had been fed back to help set the strategy's priorities. Members heard that the strategy had been presented at all the Area Consultative Forums, Area Housing Boards, the Homeless Action Forum, Disabled User Forum, Private Housing Forum, Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum, Pensioners Service User Consultative Forum and the Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) Board. A steering group had

been formed comprising political representatives, external stakeholders and those from the voluntary sector and would be reconvened to monitor the strategy. The initial impact assessment undertaken would also be repeated for each aspect of the strategy as it developed. The information provided by these assessments would be used to build on the strategy.

Turning to concerns about how the strategy would address the needs of young people, older people and ethnic minorities, Martin Cheeseman began by advising that the needs assessment had identified that there was usually a greater housing need amongst ethnic minority groups and therefore due emphasis would be placed on this need. A number of schemes, such as Supporting People and the Start Plus project had funding available to help young people. Meanwhile, the Older Persons Strategy addressed older people's needs, with a modal shift in the type of accommodation sought from sheltered accommodation to providing extra care in older persons' existing homes. Martin Cheeseman also advised that proportionally the majority of funding was used within the private sector to support older persons' needs, with the largest ever amount of funding allocated for this need in 2009/10.

During discussion, Councillor H B Patel commented on the economic downturn and sought further information on the increased difficulties residents faced in terms of mortgage payments and cuts to the interest base rate. He suggested that the present economic climate could result in homeless numbers increasing. Councillor Mistry, referring to the difficulties faced by low income households in private sector accommodation, enquired if there were the resources available to help those in need of assistance and sought further information with regard to tackling homelessness. Councillor Powney asked if the number of empty shared properties was known and sought views concerning the discrepancy between the Mayor of London's housing target for Brent and the Council's. He also asked what the likely final housing target number would be. Councillor Jones enquired whether there was a forum to raise concerns about the Mayor of London's housing targets and whether housing prices were remaining static in Brent. She also enquired whether temporary accommodation was subject to the same energy assessment as new lettings and whether funding was available for those less well-off to acquire energy saving measures. Councillor Jones also asked how the poor state of temporary accommodation in general was being addressed.

The Chair sought views on whether checks undertaken by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) on landlords met the Council's standards. She enquired about the possibility of expanding the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) registration scheme, suggesting it would improve the quality of such accommodation and she enquired how many HMOs were unregistered.

In reply, Martin Cheeseman acknowledged that the economic circumstances were impacting upon the housing sector and the ability to obtain or keep up with mortgage payments, which was leading to an increase in the number of empty properties. However, discussions with the Government were taking place as to how to tackle this issue, with greater flexibility being afforded, such as in the allocation of shared and temporary lettings and through other schemes such as 'try and buy' where properties were initially rented with a

view to being purchased at a later stage. Those in low income employment in private sector accommodation in need of help could make use of the Council's advice, where the options available would be explained to them, however there was no specific funding available to assist them. The economic situation required the Council to focus on the most pressing issues, such as homelessness and overcrowding, There were on average around 1,000 lettings available each year , achieved through a combination of existing vacated properties and new units, although this still represented a significant accommodation shortfall. However, the economic climate had resulted in more private sector accommodation becoming available. In addition, the Government had brought forward funding and was encouraging Councils to spend now as a means to try and boost the housing market, although such a strategy could result in resources not being available in the future. Funding options were also being discussed with housing associations who were being encourage to broaden their portfolios and invest in private sector accommodation to raise standards. Martin Cheeseman suggested that a review of the Government's Mortgage Rescue Scheme was needed, in particular to ensure that the values of properties in London were reflected more accurately. However, the scheme had been recently launched and it expected that it would be used to assist some Brent households soon. Members noted that housing prices had fallen in Brent, although not as sharply as many other London boroughs. Martin Cheeseman advised that there was no specific funding available for energy saving measures, although other funding opportunities could be used in such a way. For example, through the Warm Homes Scheme, where £20m in its latest cycle was available to be shared amongst 6 London boroughs, of which Brent was one of them.

Martin Cheeseman advised that discussions with RSLs were taking place to encourage landlords to improve temporary accommodation standards and to also address overcrowding which was of particular concern. He acknowledged that RSLs were sometimes not as thorough as they could be in their checks with landlords, although this was being monitored and arrangements with RSLs could be reviewed where problems persisted. The Select Committee heard that the management fees RSLs were entitled to should allow them to undertake checks to the standards required. Martin Cheeseman advised that there was a relatively large supply of temporary accommodation available and therefore there was room to be more selective, although measures were being undertaken to prevent use of temporary accommodation in the first instance, such as through encouraging housing associations to buy more properties.

Martin Cheeseman felt that the Council's housing target was more realistic than the higher one provisionally set by the Mayor of London, however discussions were continuing and would also be influenced by the level of funding available and also that specifically allocated to Brent as opposed to West London. Members heard that the Mayor of London had used more flexible criteria in proposing its housing target. However, meetings with the Mayor of London's Office had been constructive and Brent's challenges had been understood and it was hoped that an agreement favourable to the borough would be reached. The Select Committee heard that the final

housing target could be around 1,400 to 1,600 units. Martin Cheeseman advised that the HMO registration scheme could be expanded, however additional resources would be required and emphasis was being placed on prioritising the existing scheme and improving conditions in private sector accommodation. It was estimated that approximately 3–4,000 HMO properties were currently unregistered and Martin Cheeseman agreed to obtain information on the number of empty shared ownership properties.

Councillor Allie (Lead Member for Housing and Customer Services) added that although expanding the HMO registration scheme was desirable, there was no funding available to undertake this at present as Government funding was not available in the private housing sector. He advised Members that West London Councils and the Local Government Association were lobbying the Mayor of London with regard to the proposed housing targets.

The Select Committee then agreed to the Chair's suggestion to request that the Executive agree that an Action Plan be put in place to expand the HMO Registration Scheme.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that upon considering the report from the Director of Housing and Community Care, the decisions made by the Executive be noted; and
- (ii) that the Select Committee requests that the Executive agree that an Action Plan be put in place to expand the HMO registration scheme
- (ii) ***Supply and Demand and Temporary Accommodation***

Martin Cheeseman gave a brief introduction to the report, emphasising that the Council was focusing on the needs of individual needs, as opposed to groups, in temporary accommodation.

Members then discussed this item. Councillor H B Patel, in noting that the number of homeless households had fallen, sought clarification as to whether the definition of homelessness had changed, including whether the instance of a family member being removed from the home by their family constituted homelessness. He also sought views on the effectiveness of the West London-wide Locata lettings system and on what basis did it prioritise housing needs.

The Chair sought clarification as to the criteria for acquiring properties from vulnerable leaseholders in South Kilburn and she asked if there were other RSLs or schemes other than the South Kilburn New Deals for Communities (SKNDC) scheme where such property acquisition could be undertaken. She enquired how the recently introduced Local Housing Allowance was affecting private sector rents. The Chair also asked about buy to let scheme numbers and how was the Council equipped to deal with situations where tenants had been prevented access from such properties.

In reply, Martin Cheeseman advised that an effective homeless prevention strategy was the main reason there had been a reduction in the number of homeless approaches and acceptances and the strategy had involved the Council taking an enhanced role in advising those living in private sector accommodation. Members heard that removal of a family member from the home was a common reason for temporary homelessness, however the Council played a mediator role in educating and advising the parties concerned and, where possible, encouraging the return of the relative to their family home. Martin Cheeseman commented that the Locata lettings system was an improvement on the previous system, providing more fairness and offering customers more choice. Of the 5 boroughs signed up to Locata, Brent residents tended to fare better than others, whilst Brent itself was not a popular choice of location compared to the other boroughs. The majority of customers wishing to make use of Locata through the Council would be required to be presently living in Brent, and the highest priority was given to those waiting longest under the highest priority category, which included people who were homeless or had a life threatening medical condition or other emergency situation.

Martin Cheeseman advised that the Council would seek to acquire property using SKNDC funds from vulnerable leaseholders such as those with medical conditions or older persons in need of care, although there was no funding from other schemes available for this. However, such measures could be explored in discussions over any new arrangements with RSLs who would be encouraged to invest in a property portfolio of their own. The abundance of private sector accommodation meant that property rental values were falling, regardless of any changes to the Local Housing Allowance. Martin Cheeseman advised that there had also been a small rise in buy to lets, whilst the Council's advice agencies had plenty of experience in dealing with situations where tenants had been denied access and each case would be dealt with on an individual basis.

Councillor Allie added that it was policy to try to persuade relatives to return to their family homes where they had been removed, although temporary accommodation could be provided in the interim whilst negotiations continued.

RESOLVED:-

that upon considering the report from the Director of Housing and Community Care, the decisions made by the Executive be noted.

**6. The Executive List of Decisions for the meeting that took place on Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

RESOLVED:-

that the Executive List of Decisions for the meeting that took place on Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2009 be noted.

7. **Briefing notes/information updates requested by the Select Committee following consideration of Version 8 of the Forward Plan (2008/09)**

*(i) Award of Contract for Provision of Bailiff Services for Parking Enforcement*

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note on Award of Contract for Provision of Bailiff Services for Parking Enforcement be noted.

*(ii) 79 Tubbs Road*

RESOLVED:-

Members agreed to Councillor Powney's suggestion that the Select Committee requests that the Executive agree to Option 1, as it would prevent existing tenants from becoming homeless.

- (i) that the briefing note on 79 Tubbs Road be noted; and
- (ii) that the Select Committee requests that the Executive agree to Option 1 (to retain the property).

*(iii) Sub-Regional Temporary to Settled Housing Scheme*

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note on Sub-Regional to Settled Housing Scheme be noted.

*(iv) Barham Park- Proposed Estate Regeneration*

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note on Barham Park – Proposed Estate Regeneration be noted.

*(v) Travel Plan*

Councillor Jones noted that a number of recommendations had been deferred and Members agreed to her suggestion that a further briefing note be provided listing measures that have been or will be implemented and those that will not.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the briefing note on the Travel Plan be noted; and
- (ii) that a further briefing note be provided at the next meeting listing the measures that have been, or will be, implemented and measures that will not be implemented.

## 8. **The Forward Plan – Issue 11 (2008/09)**

Issue 11 of the Forward Plan (30.03.09 to 16.08.09) was before members of the Select Committee. Following consideration of Issue 11 of the Forward Plan, the Select Committee made the following requests:-

### (i) ***North Circular Road Regeneration Area***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item with information including a noise and pollution map of the North Circular Road, the percentage of those responding to the consultation, a breakdown of the consultation results and information clarifying the situation with regard to the Temple. The request was made by the Chair and Councillor Powney.

### (ii) ***Domestic Vehicle Footway Crossover Policy***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item updating Members on the progress of the Executive report. The request was made by the Chair.

### (iii) ***Climate Change Strategy***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item informing Members of the reasons for the delay to the Strategy and Action Plan. The request was made by the Chair.

### (iv) ***ALMO Settled Homes Initiative***

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item informing Members of the reasons for the delay to the Initiative. The request was made by the Chair.

## **Supporting the Achievement of Fairtrade Borough Status for Brent**

In noting this item's inclusion in Issue 11 of the Forward Plan, the Select Committee agreed the following as proposed by the Chair:

RESOLVED:-

(amendment to recommendation (b) in the Executive report)

- (i) that the Select Committee requests that the Executive agree that Fairtrade tea and coffee and other products be served at all meetings organised by the Council, including internal meetings and meetings open to the public, on all Council sites;

(additional recommendations to the Executive report)

- (ii) that the Select Committee requests that the Executive agree to amend the Council's Procurement Strategy so that Fairtrade products are the preferred choice where such products are available; and

- (iii) that the Select Committee requests that the Executive agree to ensure that a Fairtrade resolution is tabled at a meeting of the Full Council so that all Members are able to take part in the vote.

### **Sustainable Communities Act**

Councillor Powney raised the issue of the Sustainable Communities Act, which Members noted did not feature in the Forward Plan. He advised that signing up to the Act would be of considerable benefit to the Council and the community in general, and in view of the deadline to sign up to the Act being 31<sup>st</sup> July 2009, Members agreed to his suggestion that the Executive be requested to sign up to the Act by this date.

RESOLVED:-

that the Select Committee requests that the Executive agree that the Council sign up to the Sustainable Communities Act by 31<sup>st</sup> July 2009.

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

There were none.

**10. Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee would take place on Wednesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2009.

**11. Any Other Urgent Business**

There were none.

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm.

J LONG  
Chair