



# LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

## MINUTES OF THE FORWARD PLAN SELECT COMMITTEE Thursday, 26 August 2010 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Allie (Chair), Councillor Hirani (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Mrs Bacchus, Ogunro, BM Patel and Van Kalwala

Also Present: Councillors Ashraf, Beck, Butt, John, J Moher and Powney

Apologies were received from: Councillors Lorber

### 1. **Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial interests**

Councillor Powney (Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture) declared an interested as a member of the Waste London Waste Authority in relation to item 5 (b) on the agenda, Waste Management Strategy. However, he did not consider the interest personal or prejudicial and remained present to discuss this item.

### 2. **Deputations (if any)**

None.

### 3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 11 August 2010**

Members noted that the minutes would be circulated at a future meeting of the Committee.

### 4. **Matters Arising (if any)**

None.

### 5. **Call-in of Executive Decisions from the Meeting of the Executive on Wednesday, 11 August 2010**

Decisions made by the Executive on 11 August 2010 in respect of the reports below were called-in for consideration by the Forward Plan Select Committee in accordance with Standing Order 18.

#### 5.1 **Educational Use of Coniston Gardens**

The reason for the call-in was:-

- To explore further the implications of the loss of much needed capital receipts and housing and the financing of demolition and clear up of the site.

Councillor Butt (Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Resources) introduced the report and confirmed that the decision to revoke disposing of the site to a housing association and to retain the site within the Council's portfolio for educational and community use would represent a potential loss in capital receipts of £150,000. However, he confirmed that the housing association identified to purchase the site had since withdrawn its interest. In addition, with less funding available for supporting social housing and Registered Social Landlords, the prospect of the site being used for such a purpose was considerably diminished. A statement by Councillor Arnold (Lead Member for Children and Families) was circulated to Members which outlined the benefits to Oliver Goldsmith school and its pupils, young people and the local community in general by the decision that had been made.

Mick Bowden (Deputy Director of Finance and Corporate Resources) confirmed that the loss of capital receipts by not disposing of the site would not jeopardise the Capital Programme as the potential loss of £150,000 did not represent a significant variation in the £400 million overall allocated to the Programme over 2009/10 to 2013/14.

Councillor Beck, a Member who had called-in this item, was invited to address the Select Committee by the Chair. He began by enquiring whether the revocation of a previous decision made by the Executive would set a precedent for other such sites in Brent and what other avenues had been explored with regard to disposing of Coniston Gardens, such as approaches to any other housing associations. With regard to the proposed use of the site with Oliver Goldsmith Primary School, Councillor Beck enquired what percentage of funds would be used from the Schools Maintenance Budget and would the school itself be making any contributions. He also enquired if there would be any future consideration of opportunities to generate revenue from the site.

Councillor Ashraf had also called-in this item and was invited to address the Select Committee by the Chair. Councillor Ashraf, in acknowledging that retention of the site would mean the possibility of providing facilities for the school and the local community, stated that there would be costs involved in maintaining the site. He enquired about the future of the site if funds could not be raised to develop the site for educational and community uses and in view of these concerns he sought further clarity as to the overall merits of disposing of the site. He also asked if other housing associations had been approached before the decision not to dispose of the site.

During Members' discussion, Councillor Brown referred to a similar site in Sudbury that was being disposed of, stating that residents had wanted the site to be retained for allotments and he enquired why different approaches were being taken between the two sites. He suggested that other housing associations may have been interested in acquiring the Coniston Gardens site. Councillor Hirani felt that because of less funding available to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), it was unlikely that there would be approaches from such organisations to acquire the site. He commented that the site would be in danger of falling further into decline if it remained available for disposal.

In response to the issues raised, Councillor Butt advised that the decision to revoke disposing of Coniston Gardens was due to the specific circumstances of the site. This included the fact that the housing association identified in the sale of the site had withdrawn interest and the present economic climate and less funding for RSLs meaning that prospects of selling the site were greatly reduced. No other housing associations had expressed interest in the site. Councillor Butt confirmed that Oliver Goldsmith Primary School would not be making any financial contributions with regard to demolition of the scout hut and securing the site and neither would any funding be taken from other budgets for this. He added that he would confirm the percentage of funds taken from the Schools Maintenance Budget after the meeting. Councillor Butt informed Members that if an appropriate opportunity arose, disposing of the site at a future time would be considered. He referred to paragraphs 3.4 and 3.7 report which outlined short and long term proposals for the site. With regard to the Sudbury site mentioned by Councillor Brown, Councillor Butt commented that the decision to dispose of the site had been made by the previous Administration.

Councillor J Moher (Lead Member for Highways and Transportation) also responded to the issues raised. He commented that the area in question was a small site adjacent to Oliver Goldsmith Primary School and had previously been part of the school until the Council leased the site to the local Scouts association. The site had fallen into disuse in the 1980s and had since become derelict and was a health and safety hazard. The short term plan involved demolishing the scout hut, securing the site and handing it over to the school to use. There were at present no funds identified to develop the site beyond this stage but funding sources were being sought. Councillor J Moher felt that the school and the local community had demonstrated clear reasons and support to use the land for educational and community purposes, and in view that the housing association interested in acquiring the site had withdrawn, there were sound reasons to revoke the decision to dispose of the site. In the short term, the proposed wildlife centre would benefit the school pupils, whilst it was hoped that eventually the site would also provide after school hours facilities for young people and there was much the site could offer the school and local community. Councillor J Moher added that residents had long felt the site had been neglected and had submitted a large petition against disposing of the site.

Councillor John (Leader of the Council) concurred with the comments made by Councillors Butt and Moher and added that residents and the school had shown strong support in retaining the site.

Mick Bowden added that as the site had become derelict and posed a number of health and safety risks, that it made sense to secure the site and make use of it and he advised that the Council would try and avoid sites becoming unattended. With regard to the Sudbury site, he confirmed that there would be a future report on it going to the Executive. Mick Bowden advised that Oliver Goldsmith Primary School would assume management of the site and the scout hut was being demolished following a health and safety assessment. In the meantime, longer term options were being considered.

Members decided against a proposal from Councillor Brown to recommend to the Executive that it reconsider its decision not to sell the site and investigate whether a housing association would be interested in the site. Councillor Brown added that

the reasons for this were that the proposed sale of the Sudbury site clearly showed that money is still available to build and that this would bring in both capital receipts and much needed housing to the Borough.

RESOLVED:-

that upon considering the report from the Director of Children and Families, the decisions made by the Executive be noted.

## 5.2 Waste Strategy Review

The reasons for the call-in were:-

- To explore further the implications of the bulky waste charge decision and its financial impact on other services/projects
- To discuss consultation proposals regarding changes to collection patterns for refuse.

Councillor Powney (Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture) introduced the report and confirmed that the decisions made included the withdrawal of the £25 charge to dispose of bulky waste items to be replaced by free collections from 1 October 2010 and the introduction of a three bin collection system already operated by other London boroughs. The collection involved organic and food waste collection every week, whilst grey bin and dry recycling waste collection would take place on alternate weeks. The range of materials to be collected for recycling was also to be increased and would include mixed plastics and tetrapaks and collection extended to all flatted properties. Councillor Powney advised that the proposals in the Waste Strategy Review would potentially be deliver savings of £1.02 million in year two of implementation.

Councillor John added that it was very important to educate residents of the need to participate in recycling, including in flatted properties such as Chalkhill Estate and other areas difficult to reach. Working with housing associations and encouraging them to accommodate bring-back schemes would be beneficial to achieving the objectives of the Strategy. Councillor John enquired whether general waste bins eventually be reduced in size.

Councillor Beck, a member who had called-in the item, was invited to address the Select Committee by the Chair. Councillor Beck enquired what measures would be undertaken in view that some waste collections would now be fortnightly and he commented on the need to change the behaviour of residents to ensure the three bin system worked and recycling rates increased. He expressed concern that a number of residents may still be depositing food waste in residual bins which would only be collected fortnightly. Councillor Beck cited a recent article in the Evening Standard newspaper which highlighted some concerns about fortnightly collections, especially in summer which heightened the risk of animals interfering with waste and increased decaying. He asked what consideration had been made in this respect. It was enquired as to the possibility of fortnightly collections of grey bins during winter but restoring weekly collections in summer. Councillor Beck enquired where would food waste be deposited if the food bin was full and would bin lids be secured. He also sought further clarification as to why the bulky waste charge was to be removed.

Councillor Ashraf, who had also called-in this item, was invited to address the Select Committee by the Chair. Councillor Ashraf enquired whether all properties would be receiving bins of the same size and further clarity with regard to the frequency of waste collections and how refuse would be collected from flatted properties was sought. He suggested that some residents were confused by the present waste collection system and enquired what measures were being taken to educate residents about the new system and whether this would include posters. With regard to withdrawing the charge for bulky waste item collection, Councillor Ashraf enquired how the loss of income would be accommodated.

During discussion by Members, Councillor Brown noted the increased range in terms of collecting plastics for recycling and commented that the previous Executive had been advised that there was little market demand for plastic materials and could assurances be made that these materials would not end up being exported. With regard to providing larger bins to accommodate fortnightly collections, he stated that this may be problematic for properties with smaller frontages. He enquired whether the proposals would result in increased dumping and had the views of the residents been taken into account during the consultation.

Councillor B M Patel commented that there was a perception amongst some residents that all waste ultimately was sent to landfill and he sought further comments in respect of this. He cited an example of a resident being asked to pay for a grey bin at a new build property and he enquired whether it was policy not to provide grey bins free of charge and would greys bins be replaced without charge if they went missing.

In response, Councillor Powney stated that the three bin collection system would boost recycling rates and that such a system was in place amongst virtually all top performing London boroughs for waste and recycling. Larger bins would be provided for dry recycling to take into account that some collections would be fortnightly and there would be 28,000 additional bins for food waste. Members noted that residual bins would remain the same size. Councillor Powney stated that too frequent collections had shown not to encourage recycling and that measures needed to be introduced to change the behaviour of residents in order to increase recycling. With regard to animal tampering of bins, Members heard that measures would be taken to ensure bins were secure following feedback received during the consultation. The scheme would continue to be developed following its introduction and it offered an extended service including 25,000 bins. Councillor Powney acknowledged the need to change a number of residents' attitudes towards recycling and indeed considerable effort would be made to achieve this, including explaining to residents the consequences if recycling was not increased, such as rising costs due to landfill tax increases. Where space prevented recycling bins being placed in flatted properties, recycling would be made possible through co-mingled waste collection. A pilot scheme had shown that 30 percent of materials could be recycled through a mechanical recovery process for co-mingled waste and such a service would be subject to a tendering process in future and a number of other ideas for recycling were included in the report. Members were advised that some recycled materials were of some commercial value.

With regard to dumping, Councillor Powney felt that this may be a problem initially, however ultimately the three bin system would prove to be more efficient.

Residents' views would be valued during consideration of other measures to increase recycling. Councillor Powney confirmed that there were resources available to publicise the importance of recycling and posters would be one of the many measures that would be considered to achieve this. The Select Committee heard that residents would be approached if they continued to place waste in the wrong bins and it would be re-explained to them what waste went in what bin, and the importance to adhere to this would be stressed. Councillor Powney acknowledged that the loss of revenue from the removal of the bulky waste charge would have to be absorbed. He advised that bulky waste collection dropped by around 67 per cent when the charge was introduced and he suggested that such waste was instead being fly-tipped, although there were no official figures to confirm this.

Chris Whyte (Head of Environmental Management, Environment and Culture) added that the proposals would increase recycling particularly for plastic materials. He advised that Veolia owned the waste once it had been collected and it was possible that some recycled materials would be sold and sent overseas. Members noted that developers of private housing were responsible for providing bins, although the Council would remain responsible for waste collection. However, recycling containers would be provided without charge. In the event of a grey bin being taken by Veolia, a replacement bin would be provided at no cost, however a charge would be applicable if the bin had been stolen. Chris Whyte added that residents were permitted to use ways to secure their bins. There was no limit in the number of bins residents were entitled to and although there were extra costs involved in providing more recycling bins, this would be mitigated by reduced costs in waste sent to landfill. Members noted that smaller general waste bins were already available to residents if they so wished and there may be an opportunity to reduce the size of such bins in future. Chris Whyte advised that most organic waste consisted of food waste which would be deposited throughout the year and therefore needed to be collected on a weekly basis. There would be a waste collection of some sort each week, although the specific arrangements for each type of waste collection could be reconsidered in future.

Irfan Malik (Assistant Director – Streets and Transportation, Environment and Culture) stressed the important role councillors could play in encouraging residents to recycle more and he suggested that councillors could be invited to visit the Borough's recycling waste sites which were being extended. He stated that concerns about residents' participation in recycling had been raised when compulsory recycling was introduced, however the scheme was implemented with little difficulty. Members noted that residents could use the organic bin if the food bin became full.

RESOLVED:-

that upon considering the report from the Director of Environment and Culture, the decisions made by the Executive be noted.

### **5.3 Introduction of a Vehicle Emission-Based Charging Regime for Residents' Parking Permits**

The reasons for the call-in were:-

- Controlled Parking Zones were originally introduced to protect residents, not produce revenue for the Council. Call-in should explore further the possibility of a cost neutral scheme and the implications for residents of the proposed scheme.

Councillor J Moher introduced this item, stating the scheme was a complex one designed to address emission reductions. The Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) schemes would still continue to provide protection for residents and facilitate parking provision in their area and remained particularly important in areas where there was considerable pressure on parking spaces such as in the south and east of the Borough. An emissions-based scheme had been introduced in 2008, whilst this scheme sought to relate CPZ charges to the level of CO2 emissions from any given vehicle with the intention to encourage residents to use lower emission vehicles. With regard to concerns about excessive charging, Councillor J Moher advised that CPZ permit fees had not risen in 1999 and were lower compared to neighbouring London boroughs. He drew Members' attention to the proposed charges as set out in the report and stated that the lowest emitting vehicles would be eligible for CPZ permits at no cost or the present £50 fee. It was estimated that approximately one-third of vehicle owners in the Borough would pay either £50 or £75 for their first annual permit. Only higher emitting vehicles would be subject to the higher CPZ charges, however as such vehicles were usually more expensive it was likely that the owners would have more ability to pay the higher fee. The fee charges would place the Borough more in line with other London boroughs. Residents could choose to return their permits on a buy-back scheme if they were to change their mode of transport or decided to join a car club. Councillor J Moher added that both The Daily Telegraph newspaper and the Automobile Association had praised a vehicle emissions based scheme for parking permits.

Councillor Beck, a member who had called-in the item, was invited to address the Select Committee by the Chair. Councillor Beck enquired what revenue would the Council receive from the scheme and had there been consideration of any other proposals to reduce vehicle emissions without raising revenue. He sought views with regard to balancing the need to reduce vehicle emissions and increase revenue.

Councillor Ashraf, who had also called-in the item, was invited to address the Select Committee by the Chair. Councillor Ashraf sought clarification with regard to the engine capacity limit for band two in the charging scheme and whether consideration had been given as to the impact this may have on motorists who may consider increasing their driveways or concreting over their front gardens. He also asked how the buy-back permit scheme would be funded.

During Members' discussion, Councillor Brown suggested that the scheme could be cost neutral by not raising more revenue from residents through reducing the permit costs of lower emission vehicles by an even larger amount. Councillor Hirani felt that the scheme would contribute to the wider issue of reducing emissions which would be beneficial both in environmental and medical terms and he felt the scheme was based on sound objectives.

In reply, Councillor J Moher advised that approximately £1.1 million revenue would be raised each year from the scheme and this income would only be used for transportation measures and the administrative costs of the scheme. In addition,

the scheme may encourage residents to change their behaviour and use lower emission vehicles or use public transport. Councillor J Moher asserted that raising revenue was not the main objective of the scheme, however income was needed to introduce transport initiatives and motorists would be made fully aware of the costs. Councillor J Moher suggested that residents would not be tempted to consider concreting their front gardens or extending their driveways as the costs involved would far exceed that of the CPZ permits, irrespective of the charging band. In addition, there were strict planning regulations in place in respect of concreting front gardens. Councillor J Moher advised that the permit buy-back initiative would be funded through the extra revenue created by the scheme and that such a measure had been a success in the London Boroughs of Islington and Lambeth.

Councillor Powney expressed doubt that the scheme could be cost neutral because of the administrative costs involved and suggested that such a move could raise the possibility of having to use funds from the General Budget.

Adrian Piggott (Acting Policy Manager, Transportation Unit, Environment and Culture) added the CPZ permits would still be cheaper in real terms than when they were initially introduced, whilst a number of other London boroughs had made more significant CPZ permit charge increases. He confirmed that band two charges for vehicles registered before 1 March 2001 was for vehicles with engine size 1101 to 1200cc. Members noted that car manufacturers were looking at introducing cleaner engines in the future.

Irfan Malik confirmed that any income from the scheme would be accrued to the parking account and he advised Members that Capital funding and funding from Section 106 agreements for transport initiatives did not look promising in the foreseeable future, whilst Transport for London funding was also being reduced.

RESOLVED:-

that upon considering the report from the Director of Environment and Culture, the decisions made by the Executive be noted.

**6. The Executive List of Decisions for the Meeting that took place on Wednesday, 11 August 2010**

RESOLVED:-

that the Executive List of Decisions for the meeting that took place on Wednesday, 11 August 2010 be noted.

**7. Briefing Notes/Information Updates requested by the Select Committee following consideration of Issue 4 (2010/11) of the Forward Plan**

**7.1 Annual Complaints Report 2009/10**

Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director – Policy and Regeneration Unit) introduced the briefing note and stated that Corporate complaints had fallen from 2006/07 onwards until 2009/10, when a slight increase had been recorded. This was mainly due to a significant increase in Stage One complaints in respect of the Revenue and Benefits Service. This was partly attributable to a significant increase in new or



change in circumstance cases because of the economic downturn. Complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) had similarly fallen over recent years and the same number had been referred to the LGO in 2009/10 as had been the previous year. As in the previous two years, no formal complaints had been issued by the LGO and just seven complaints resulted in local settlements, a rate of 11 per cent compared to the National Average of 26.9 per cent and the second lowest overall amongst London boroughs. Cathy Tyson drew Members' attention to Equalities data in respect of complaints and advised that many complainants chose not to provide such information. Members noted that mapping was currently underway to identify the source of complaints by postcode.

During Members' discussion, Councillor Van Kalwala enquired how the Equalities data was used, stating that it was important that such information was collected and he enquired whether different approaches were being considered to increase the number of respondents and whether the Call Centre asked for such information. He felt that it was particularly important to obtain ethnicity details of complainants in view of the Borough's wide ethnic diversity. Councillor Van Kalwala also enquired whether a translator service was available in respect of Child Care complaints. Councillor Hirani suggested that the Equalities data section be placed at the front of the complaints form to increase the response rate. Councillor B M Patel asked in what form the majority of complaints were submitted and why was it important to obtain ethnic details of a complainant.

The Chair enquired about the nature of complaints in respect of housing repairs and he asked to be provided with more information in respect of this. He also sought further details with regard to restructuring in the Housing Benefits Service.

In reply to the issues raised, Cathy Tyson advised that the Council was obliged to request Equalities data from complainants, although few actually provided this and such information needed to be used sensitively. In addition, many complaints were received by letter or e-mail rather than through the Complaints Form. Cathy Tyson advised that a number of different measures were being considered to increase Equalities information response and Members noted that the Equalities section was in the form of a tear off slip on the Complaints Form in order to mitigate concerns from residents that the information might be used as part of the complaint's assessment. Another measure that could be considered was to request Equalities data from complainants after the complaint had been resolved. Members noted that the Call Centre would not seek Equalities information from complainants. Cathy Tyson advised that it was important to obtain such data as there were concerns that some ethnic groups were not accessing the complaints process as much as others, particularly as some Service Areas used by specific ethnic groups were not submitting a proportionate amount of complaints. Members noted that most complaints were submitted in written form. Cathy Tyson advised that Child Care complaints were handled under a separate process and a translator service was available for complaints of this nature.

In respect of housing repair complaints, Cathy Tyson advised that most involved the quality of work or delays to repairs and she agreed to provide the Chair with more information on this. Members heard that the restricting of the Housing Benefits Service focused on making customer contact more direct and speeding up the whole process. This involved ensuring that the customer was in contact with the most relevant officer at the earliest stage. Cathy Tyson added that although there

being more claimants partly explained why complaints had increased, most appeals were not being upheld and there was not an increase in the number of claimants being incorrectly assessed. However, this area would continue to be monitored.

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note on the Annual Complaints Report 2009/10 be noted.

8. **The Forward Plan - Issue 4**

Members noted Issue 4 (2010/11) of the Forward Plan.

9. **Items considered by the Executive that were not included in the Forward Plan (if any)**

None.

10. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that proposals would be put to Full Council on 13 September 2010 with regard to changing the name of the Forward Plan Select Committee and to revise its remit to meet only if decisions from the Executive have been called-in. In view of this, the date of the next meeting was yet to be confirmed.

11. **Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

The meeting closed at 9.50 pm

J ALLIE  
Chair