



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

Minutes of an EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
held on Wednesday, 13 April 2011 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor Harbhajan Singh

The Deputy Mayor
Councillor M Aslam Choudry

COUNCILLORS:

Aden	Adeyeye
Al-Ebadi	Allie
Arnold	Mrs Bacchus
Beck	Beckman
Beswick	Brown
Butt	Castle
Cheese	Chohan
Clues	Colwill
Crane	Cummins
Daly	Denselow
Gladbaum	Green
Harrison	Hirani
Hossain	Hunter
John	Jones
Kabir	Kansagra
Kataria	Long
Lorber	Mashari
Matthews	McLennan
Mistry	Mitchell Murray
J Moher	R Moher
Moloney	Naheerathan
Ogunro	Oladapo
BM Patel	CJ Patel
HB Patel	HM Patel
RS Patel	Powney
Ms Shaw	Sheth
Thomas	Van Kalwala

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from: Councillors Ashraf, Baker, S Choudhary, Hashmi, Hector, Leaman and Sneddon

1. **Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests**

Councillor Lorber declared a personal interest in the item on the summons by virtue of being a Director of Friends of Barham Library and a trustee of a related charitable trust.

2. **Petition - Keep Preston Library open/oppose the sale or redevelopment of the site**

A petition comprising over 5000 signatures had been submitted to the Council in the following terms:

Keep Preston Road Library open

We the undersigned petition the council to keep Preston Road Library open and give full consideration to alternatives to the removal of essential local library services to the Preston ward under the Brent "Library Transformation Project". We oppose the sale or redevelopment of the site that does not include a Brent public library.

Under the terms of the Council's petition scheme the petition had been referred to Full Council for debate.

The lead petitioner, Samantha Warrington, addressed the Council meeting. She stated that because the Executive had agreed to close six libraries she hoped members would have the answers to many questions that had arisen during the course of the consultation. She referred to the outcome of the consultation that showed 82% of respondents disagreed with the proposals to close libraries and stated that it had been claimed that these were not the people the Council wanted to hear from. She asked why then the children from local schools, and the congregations of local churches and places of worship all of whom had signed the petition had not been taken notice of. She asked how much the Council had paid consultants to produce the Library Transformation Project. She referred to the cost of providing a library in the new civic centre and why people had not been informed of this cost and instead told about the new civic centre being cost neutral and that the Willesden Library centre would not be demolished when it was going to be. Samantha Warrington asked if councillors believed in a comprehensive library service and that providing games in libraries would help with the development of the service. She asked if councillors believed in making the library service accessible to all, including those that could not afford a bus fare to travel to a library. She asked if it was a good use of money to provide a virtual library service for those people without computers at home. Samantha Warrington claimed that outdated figures and statistics had been used and asked why alternative savings had not been identified. She asked what would happen if the projected use of libraries contained in the transformation project did not materialise. She felt people deserved the answers to all these questions and asked that the decision to close Preston Library be reversed.

RESOLVED:

that the contents of the petition be noted and debated under item 4 below.

3. **Procedural motion**

Councillor Moloney moved a procedural motion concerning the conduct of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That having heard from the petitioner, the Leader of each political group be allowed to speak for up to five minutes each, after which the Labour Group be allowed up to four speakers, the Liberal Democrat Group be allowed up to two speakers, and the Conservative Group allowed one speaker, with all contributions being subject to the normal rules for debate, after which the meeting shall move to vote on the motion.

4. **Motion - Saving Brent's Libraries**

Opening the debate, Councillor Lorber stated that there had been a long consultation exercise at the end of which the Executive had decided to ignore the views expressed. He added that local people had rejected the proposals which had been recycled from time gone by. Councillor Lorber stated that there were clear alternatives and that these would be scrutinised when the Executive decisions were called-in. The project would result in large parts of the borough not being served by a library. He explained that the previous administration had supported the provision of a new library in the civic centre on the basis that it would be an additional library and that was why there had been investment in libraries during this time. It was the responsibility of local councillors to speak out for their area and Councillor Lorber stated that Liberal Democrat councillors would work with the community to re-establish any library that was closed. He moved the motion circulated.

Councillor Kansagra made a point that although the consultation had run until 4 March, the decision on the libraries had effectively been taken when the budget had been agreed on 28 February. He felt that the proposals submitted by community groups had not been fully analysed to see how the libraries could stay open. He submitted that the full year saving arising from the project could be achieved by stopping the ward working programme. He felt ward working could be re-introduced when circumstances changed but closed libraries could not. Councillor Kansagra stated that the sites of Preston and Tokyngton libraries were earmarked for housing development and that this could include retaining the libraries. He referred to the Council being given extra government grant of £2.53m but instead of using this to preserve front line services it had been put into reserves. He said that reserves were for a rainy day and that it was now raining.

Councillor John stated that the administration did support the library service and that was why it had agreed that the six remaining libraries would remain open for 7 days a week and provide a more accessible and expanded service fit for the 21st century. She pointed out that this Council meeting had been called for political purposes because it did not have the power to overturn the decisions of the Executive. Accordingly it was at the meeting of the Executive where people were heard speaking in support of their local library but it was the responsibility of the Council to consider the service provided to the whole of the borough. Councillor John referred to the scale of the cuts facing the Council. Savings of £23m in

efficiencies had been achieved but the Council could not achieve the required savings of £43m without making cuts to services. She added that some library buildings were not fit for purpose; in the past making difficult decisions on the library service had been avoided but faced with having to make such large savings decisive decisions needed to be taken. She referred to many Councils being faced with similar challenges and stressed the importance of the Council ensuring its services were accessible to the housebound and disabled. Many submissions made to the council had called for a specific local library to remain open but the Council had to consider the whole borough provision.

The following points were made during debate of the item.

It was claimed that the decision went against the results of the consultation and so ignored the wishes of local people. It appeared that the wrong interpretation had been given to the results of the consultation. Reference was made to the previous library strategy. A view was put that Preston library was housed in a beautiful building and the hope expressed that it would remain open. It was suggested that the Council's executive style decision making process had led to the decisions on the library service being made by only ten members of the Council in the face of considerable opposition. It was also claimed that if a free vote was permitted at the council meeting it would lead to some of the libraries remaining open. It was stated that the role of a local councillor was to defend the rights of residents and that the situation had been misjudged to the extent that a U turn was needed.

Reference was made to people being misled into believing that the Council could change the decision taken by the Executive when this was constitutionally impossible. It was suggested that there was limited support from people for all the libraries to stay open. Expressing sympathy with views put forward regarding the provision of services, it was pointed out that the decisions taken on the library service included a report back on the future use of the buildings. It was pointed out that there was a continued willingness to consider proposals from the community to run local services but this could only be on a realistic basis and at no cost to the Council. There was appreciation of the interest and passion shown by those protesting against the decisions but it was stressed that it had to be understood that extremely difficult decisions had to be made in the current climate. The proposals for the library service had been the subject of many months discussion and if it was felt there was a better alternative it would have been followed. Even so it was submitted that the proposals would provide a much better service fit for the 21st century for all residents.

Attention was drawn to the local and national interest in the future of Kensal Library and the hope expressed that the level of local opposition would encourage the Executive to grant more time to consider alternatives in an effort to keep the library open.

Reference was made to the many meetings held with local interest groups and to the large amount of information provided by officers to interested groups. It was claimed that the strategy was designed to result in more people using the library service and more books being lent. It was stated that no credible alternatives had been put forward for keeping all the libraries open. The view was put that lots of people used public transport to get around and this should not stop people using libraries. A reference was made to comments about the loss of community space

at Preston Library and it was stated that future plans for use of the building could bear this in mind.

Referring to the comments regarding past investment in the library service, it was pointed out that this was during a time when government provided the necessary funding to local government. The point was again made that the Council had significantly less funding and had to look at the wider picture. It was made all the worse by the Government front loading the budget cuts.

The motion was put to the vote and declared LOST.

In accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 47(c) the voting on the motion was recorded as follows:

For:	Councillors Allie, Beck, Brown, Castle, Cheese, Clues, Colwill, Cummins, Green, Hunter, Kansagra, Lorber, Matthews, BM Patel, CJ Patel, HB Patel, HM Patel and Shaw (18)
Against:	The Deputy Mayor, Councillors Aden, Adeyeye, Al-Ebadi, Arnold, Mrs Bacchus, Beckman, Beswick, Butt, Chohan, Crane, Daly, Denselow, Gladbaum, Harrison, Hirani, Hossain, John, Jones, Kabir, Kataria, Long, Mashari, Mitchell Murray, Mistry, McLennan, J Moher, R Moher, Moloney, Naheerathan, Ogunro, Oladapo, RS Patel, Powney, Sheth, Thomas and Van Kalwala (37)
Abstention:	The Mayor (1)

The meeting closed at 7.55 pm

COUNCILLOR HARBHAJAN SINGH
Mayor