



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

Minutes of the SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
held on Monday 10 December 2012 at 7.15 pm

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor Michael Adeyeye

The Deputy Mayor
Councillor Bobby Thomas

COUNCILLORS:

Aden	Al-Ebadi
Allie	Arnold
Mrs Bacchus	Beck
Beswick	Brown
Butt	Cheese
Chohan	S Choudhary
A Choudry	Colwill
Crane	Cummins
Daly	Denselow
Gladbaum	Harrison
Hashmi	Hector
Hirani	Hopkins
Hossain	Hunter
John	Jones
Kabir	Kansagra
Kataria	Leaman
Long	Lorber
Mashari	Matthews
Moloney	Naheerathan
Ogunro	Oladapo
BM Patel	CJ Patel
HB Patel	HM Patel
RS Patel	Pavey
Powney	Ms Shaw
Krupa Sheth	Singh
Sneddon	Van Kalwala

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from: Councillors Ashraf, Baker, Green, McLennan, Mitchell Murray, J Moher, R Moher and Ketan Sheth

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

None declared.

2. **Procedural motion**

Councillor S Choudhary moved a procedural motion relating to discussion of the business at the meeting.

RESOLVED:

that in respect of Summons item 3 – Local Council Tax Support Scheme and Changes to Council Tax Discounts and Exemptions:

The Leader be permitted up to 10 minutes in which to present the report;

Members be given the opportunity to ask questions for clarity;

A general debate to follow for up to 30 minutes in accordance with the normal rules set out in Standing Order 44(b).

3. **Appointments to committees and outside bodies and appointment of chairs/vice chairs**

None.

4. **Local Council Tax Support Scheme and Changes to Council Tax Discounts and Exemptions**

Members had before them the circulated report which set out the findings and outcomes of the consultation arrangements for the proposed local Council Tax Support Scheme carried out over a nine week period between 11 June and 10 August 2012. The report recommended a scheme for a new local Council Tax Support scheme based upon the outcomes from the consultation process and achieving, as far as reasonably practicable, a financially neutral position in 2013/14 (the first year of operation).

The report also recommended changes to Council Tax discounts and exemptions from 1 April 2013 for certain classes of empty properties.

Attached to the report were the financial and equality impacts of the recommended scheme and changes to the discounts and exemptions

Councillor Butt (Leader) introduced the report. He criticised the Government's proposals for replacing the current national Council Tax benefit scheme by a localised Council Tax support scheme. Despite a cut in funding passed on by the Government equalling a loss of between £3.9M to £5.1M, a scheme was proposed that was as fair as possible and protected the most vulnerable people in the borough. It was also designed to incentivise work. However, it had been necessary to ask some people to pay more in order to meet the funding shortfall. Councillor

Butt pointed out that there remained the risk associated with collecting money from people not able to afford it.

During questioning it was explained that a collection rate of 80% had been set as a realistic target in the circumstances. It was acknowledged that some people would find it hard to pay and the scheme tried to provide fairness in requiring all those liable to pay a fair charge. Despite a plea for the levy on the job seekers allowance to be reviewed it was stated that this would not have been imposed if the Government had not reduced the funding made available and stipulated some groups that had to be protected. The same applied to pensioners some of whom, despite the scheme being designed to protect them, would face financial hardship. It was argued that the scheme did not need to provide for a surplus because the Council already had sufficient reserves. The Leader stated that this was normal good financial planning because if the collection rate was not achieved so the surplus would reduce.

Councillor Lorber re-iterated that the budgeted surplus was unnecessary and if the collection rate was not achieved that would reflect on the performance of the Council, not individual tax payers. He moved amendments to the scheme which sought to adjust upwards the savings cut-off, protect non-dependents in receipt of job seekers allowance for the first twelve months from their first claim and set a lower minimum contribution rate.

Councillor Kansagra stated that it was always claimed to be the fault of the Government when the present position was down to the previous Labour government. He felt the poorest were being hit instead of dealing with wastage and suggested the Council should adopt the Government's fall-back scheme. The suggested amendments to the scheme were rejected on a vote.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the making and implementation of the recommended Council Tax Support Scheme as set out in section 5 and Appendix H of the report circulated be supported and authorised;
- (ii) that the recommended discounts for the Council Tax Discount and Exemption classes to come into effect from 1st April 2013 as set out in paragraphs 10.1, 10.2 and Table 15 of the report circulated be supported and authorised;
- (iii) that the response for the Council to reject the Government's conditional offer to accept a transition grant for the Council Tax Support Scheme be approved for the reasons set out in section 4.16 to section 4.23 and Appendix F of the report circulated;
- (iv) that the findings on equalities and other impacts arising from the proposed Council Tax Scheme as set out in Section 5 of the report circulated be noted;
- (v) that the findings of the Equalities Impact Assessment in relation to the recommended changes to the Council Tax discounts and exemptions as set out in Section 10 of the report circulated be noted;

- (vi) that the alternative scheme options that existed be noted, in particular the transition funding since made available to Local Authorities that designed their schemes to be compliant with certain key requirements prescribed by the Government as set out in their transitional grant scheme dated 18 October 2012.

5. **Urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 7.55 pm

COUNCILLOR MICHAEL ADEYEYE
Mayor