

Extract from Minutes - Council Meeting 23rd November 2009**FIRST READING DEBATE ON 2010/11 to 2012/13 BUDGET****11. To hold a first reading debate - 2010/11 to 2012/13 budget**

Councillor Lorber introduced the reports of the Executive and Director of Finance and Corporate Resources. The report of the Executive (separately circulated) set out the Administration's top priorities for activity, spending and saving. The report from the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources presented the best information available to the Council at the present time on the Budget position. It contained assumptions of external funding for 2010/11 based on figures in the current Comprehensive Spending Review, including a 1.5% increase in Formula Grant. The report pointed out that there was considerable uncertainty about funding in later years with an expectation that this would not become clearer until after a General Election. Councillor Lorber stated that as the current year progressed the consequences of the economic recession became clearer. The Council had launched an Improvement and Efficiency Strategy designed to save at least £50M over the next four years. There was no expectation that the Council would receive an increase in funding over this period despite the local population growth placing additional demands on council services. The priorities of the Council were to deliver improved services to residents whilst reducing costs and creating a 'One Council' approach. In the longer term a key aspect of this strategy would be the building of the new Civic Centre. Councillor Lorber referred to transformation projects in adult social care and children's social care which had already produced better services for less money. He confirmed that the four key priorities set out in the Corporate Plan - crime and community safety, young people, environmental sustainability and regeneration, would continue to be the priorities for directing resources into. Councillor Lorber referred to uncertainty caused by the Government changing funding decisions such as withdrawing nearly £4M from the Working Neighbourhood Fund and now threatening to withdraw funding from London for the Freedom Pass which would cost the Council over £1M a year. Councillor Lorber referred to many of the achievements of the Council since 2006 and stated that the Administration would continue to work on improving services.

Councillor Blackman referred to the serious problem of massive Government debt which the Government would have to take action to reduce and he felt this would particularly affect capital projects. He referred to past successive Council budgets that had effectively more than doubled the Council Tax compared with the current Administration which had, over its term, increased the Council Tax by less than 10% with a promise of no increase next year. The Council would meet its responsibility to produce a balanced budget on the assumption of no extra money coming in to the Council and at the same time not squeezing the Council Tax payer. Councillor Blackman referred to

dramatic improvements in Council services and made reference to improved customer satisfaction.

Councillor Detre supported the Improvement and Efficiency Strategy as the way to provide value for money services. He felt the One Council approach could be extended to looking at ways the Council could further support the many organisations in the borough that provided services to residents.

Councillor Clues referred particularly to the work undertaken on community safety and remarked on how coherent the Council's strategies had been. He emphasised the importance of partnership working and referred to the Council's robust and progressive programme which had delivered services producing greater satisfaction.

Councillor Wharton explained the cost pressures facing the Children and Families service which were almost as great as those facing Adult Social Care. The number of referrals had been rising before the Baby Peter case accelerated this and there were increased demands from children with disabilities. The rise in demand for services had been met by improving efficiency. He used as an example the review of Brent Transport Services that had saved £1M and improved satisfaction rates.

Councillor Matthews referred to earlier discussion and added that consideration had to be given to how improved services could be delivered at less cost. Accessing additional funds was an important part of delivering the services that came within her portfolio of crime prevention and community safety and she outlined some of the initiatives undertaken to attract funds and provide new services.

Councillor Coughlin suggested that it was usual for an administration to have clear policies rather than only reference to an Improvement and Efficiency strategy which he felt simply set out a four year plan to save money. He submitted that any government could be blamed for a lack of resources but asked what improvements the Council intended to make, what spending plans it had, what approach would be adopted towards fees and charges and what areas were a priority for spending money on. Councillor Coughlin added that much was made of past Council Tax increases but no action had been taken to reverse these increases over the last three years.

Councillor Allie spoke of the challenges for the Council post May 2010 but stated that the housing service had already risen to the challenge and achieved a 4 star service. He outlined some of the achievements of the service.

Councillor Van Colle considered that the Council faced a situation that nobody had faced before. He questioned how any plans for growth could be considered when it was clear the Council would not have the money to fund these. He stated that if the Improvement and Efficiency strategy was

successful this might free up some resources and on this basis he was hopeful for the future.

Councillor Dunwell questioned the ability of each of the three main parties on the Council to deal with the challenges facing the Council.

Councillor Mendoza stated that despite the knocks taken on the capital programme, withdrawal of grant monies, the Baby Peter case and difficulties with the PCT, the Council had over the last three years remained on course to deliver its programme. He felt the Council's reputation had been improved and was excited by the Improvement and Efficient strategy.

Councillor Sneddon outlined the achievements under his portfolio of Human Resources & Diversity and Local Democracy & Consultation.

Councillor HB Patel stated that over the last 4 years the Council had improved many aspects of its services and dealt with the service priorities in an efficient way.

RESOLVED:-

that the reports from the Executive and the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources on the 1st Reading of the 2010/11 Budget be noted and that the views submitted by Members during the course of the 1st Reading Debate be referred to the Budget Panel for noting.