



## **MINUTES OF THE CALL IN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** **Wednesday, 2 February 2011 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Castle (Chair) and Councillors Mrs Bacchus, Denselow, Gladbaum, Kabir, Lorber and Mashari and H B Patel (alternate for Councillor B M Patel)

Also Present: Councillor Crane (Lead Member for Regeneration and Economic Development), Councillor Jones (Lead Member for Human Resources and Diversity, Local Democracy and Consultation), Councillor R Moher (Lead Member for Adults, Health and Social Care), J Moher (Lead Member for Highways and Transportation) and Powney (Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture).

Apologies were received from: Councillor B M Patel.

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

Councillor H B Patel declared an interest in relation to item 4.2, Arts and Festivals Strategy, as a member of an organisation receiving a grant from the council. However, he did not feel that the interest was prejudicial and remained present to discuss and vote on this item.

### **2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 5 January 2011**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the last meeting held on 5 January 2011 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

### **3. Matters Arising**

None.

### **4. Call in of Executive decisions from the meeting of the Executive held on 17 January 2011**

Decisions made by the Executive on 17 January 2011 in respect of the reports below were called in for consideration by the Call In Overview and Scrutiny Committee in accordance with Standing Orders 6 (b) and 18.

#### **4.1 De-commissioning of the Mental Health Community Networks Day Care Service**

The reason for the call in was:-

- To discuss fully the implications of de-commissioning this service at the same time as the changes in the Adult Social Care Direct Services provision.

Suggested action for the Call In Overview and Scrutiny Committee to take:-

- To consider if alternative arrangements would enable the impact on service users to be minimised.

Councillor Lorber, one of the councillors who had called in this item, introduced the reasons for call in and expressed concern that an important service was proposed for closure, especially as there were also proposals to close day centres. He felt that there would be immediate implications in de-commissioning this service and could place some 185 clients at high risk.

During discussion, the Chair sought clarification with regard to the implications of de-commissioning this service. He also felt that the clients' ability to become more self-reliant could be limited by their mental health condition. Councillor Mashari asked what arrangements were in place to ensure that clients would be able to access the community facilities that they would be encouraged to use and how frequently would this be monitored. With regard to the proposed two support worker posts for the new arrangements, she enquired how their work time would be rationalised and would it be based on client needs. Councillor Kabir asked whether the risk to individual clients would be monitored. Councillor Denselow enquired whether the consultation would provide opportunity for alternative arrangements to be suggested in order to minimise impact and was there certainty in the benefits of the proposals being achieved. Councillor Lorber asked if a budget was available to support the clients and what was the evidence to show the benefits of the proposals. He also enquired whether a support group would be available to the client's carers.

In reply to the issues raised, Councillor R Moher (Lead Member for Adults, Health and Social Care) advised that the Executive had agreed to consult on the proposals and no final decision had been made. She acknowledged that some difficult decisions needed to be made, however in view of the financial situation facing the council it had little other choice but to consider such proposals. Members heard that the Adult Social Care budget was comparatively large and so it was inevitable that a significant proportion of savings would be required from it. Two support workers would be recruited to assist the clients in accessing community facilities.

Alison Elliott (Assistant Director – Community Care, Housing and Community Care) drew Members' attention to the possible risk implications and benefits as outlined in the report. Overall, there was to be a move away from buildings-based mental health support to a move to clients accessing community facilities more frequently. Alison Elliott explained that the Government agenda for Adult Social Care focused on increasing independence and opportunities for those with disabilities, mental health issues and for older people. Resources were to be used to support clients in a different way and the benefits would include meeting the personalisation agenda and improved access to community facilities. Monitoring of clients would continue and resources would be available to support access to community facilities. Alison Elliott explained that the current service encouraged users to access community facilities and the new proposals would provide the support arrangements required to signpost people to community facilities. Although a potential risk was posed, there were other areas of the service as well as the proposed support workers who could help the clients, such as the Community Mental Health Team. The support

workers would offer a drop-in and advice facility and carers could also have access to a similar service if support for this was expressed in the consultation. Alison Elliott advised that a care programme approach was taken which meant that individuals would be reviewed on at least an annual basis. The committee noted that the consultation would provide opportunity for alternative arrangements to be made and that a separate budget to support clients would not be available.

The committee then decided not to agree to a recommendation put forward by the Chair that the Executive consider if alternative arrangements would enable the impact on service users to be minimised.

RESOLVED:-

that upon considering the report from the Director of Housing and Community Care on De-commissioning of the Mental Health Community Networks Day Care Service, the decisions made by the Executive be noted.

#### **4.2 Arts and Festivals Strategy**

The reason for the call in was:-

- To discuss full the implications of reductions in funding and to discuss the reasoning behind the proposals to retain funding for the remaining festivals.

Suggested action for the Call In Overview and Scrutiny Committee to take:-

- To consider whether alternative funding arrangements could produce better results for residents.

With the approval of the Chair, Nirmal Patel addressed the committee to represent the views of the Hindu Council. Nirmal Patel expressed concern that there were proposals to stop the grant to help celebrate Navratri, an important event that had been funded by the council over the last four decades and represented one of the largest Navratri events outside of India. She explained that Navratri offered the opportunity for children to help understand Indian culture and tradition. The committee heard that Navratri represented a good example of the council working in partnership with the community, whilst the costs involved were relatively low and there was no expenditure on staffing and policing or any health and safety issues. There had also never been any public disorder in celebrating Navratri whilst councillors also enjoyed participating. Nirmal Patel suggested that by assisting with Navratri, the council was meeting one of its objectives in caring for the community and without the council's help there would not be sufficient funds available to continue celebrating this event in Brent.

With the approval of the Chair, Bharat Gajjar, representing an organisation affiliated to the Hindu Council, addressed the committee. Bharat Gajjar advised Members that the Hindu Council had met with the council on 27 January where they were informed of proposals to withdraw funding for Navratri. He explained that Navratri was an important part of Hindu culture and that withdrawing the grant to help celebrate it would be detrimental to a significant proportion of the community. Members noted that most of the costs involved for Navratri were related to hiring halls, such as those in schools, meaning most of the money was being put back

into Brent organisations. Bharat Gajjar suggested that it would be preferable to reduce funding for Diwali which was self-funded to a large extent in any case and use the funds released to support Navratri instead. He concluded by stating that the Hindu Council had worked with the council for a long time and he urged that the council re-consider and continue providing funds for Navratri.

With the approval of the Chair, Paresh Modasia, representing the Hindu Council, addressed the committee. Paresh Modasia stated that Navratri was an important cultural festival that engaged all the Hindu community including both young and old. It gave the opportunity to teach children Hindu morals and good citizenship and there had never been any public order issues at any of the events, with the police withdrawing from attending some years back due to there being no need for their presence. Paresh Modasia felt that use of school halls to host events represented positive engagement with the community and withdrawing the grant would deprive underprivileged groups in Brent. Paresh Modasia also suggested that it would be preferable to reduce the Diwali grant and retain the Navratri grant. He expressed concern about the timescale of the final decision on this matter, stating that a decision in June could be too late as school halls needed to be booked well in advance and he asked that clarity on this issue be provided at the earliest opportunity. He also sought a breakdown of costs with regard to Diwali funding.

With the approval of the Chair, Paresh Shah, representing Aden Mitra Mandal, an organisation affiliated to the Hindu Council, addressed the committee. Paresh Shah acknowledged that the council needed to make savings and stated that he would be happy to work with the council to suggest ways of supporting Navratri. He stated that because of the difficult economic circumstances, the need for council funding to support Navratri was as great as ever and he asked that the council consider ways of continuing to provide support for this event.

During discussion, Councillor Lorber stated that both the options in the report recommended ceasing of funding for Navratri and he expressed concern that in effect the consultation did not offer the opportunity for the grant to remain. He suggested that it would be more useful to explain in the consultation the need to cease funding of some festivals and give the opportunity for residents to indicate preferences for what ones the council should continue to support. He felt that the council needed to build trust with residents because of dissatisfaction with previous consultations. With regard to Diwali, Councillor Lorber commented that this was a costly event to support and involved road closures and the presence of health and safety officers. He asked whether the Hindu Council had been asked whether they wanted the council to organise events for this. Councillor Lorber suggested that the council was not the appropriate organisation to organise events in any case and that funds should be given to the relevant individual organisations to manage such events. In addition, the Navratri grant benefited the local community as a lot of the funds went to local schools and the money involved was not especially large.

Councillor Denselow commented that the council faced its biggest challenge yet in the coming year in terms of the savings that needed to be made. He felt that representations made by the Hindu Council had shown a willingness to consider pragmatic solutions and despite the financial problems, ways of supporting Navratri could be explored. He added that although options one and two both proposed that the grant for Navratri ceases, depending upon the consultation another option could possibly be pursued. Councillor H B Patel enquired whether the Navratri grant

would remain if there was majority support for this from the consultation and he stressed the need for clarity and clearness in the consultation documents. Councillor Mashari acknowledged the importance of Navratri and she encouraged the Hindu Council to participate in the consultation and to express their wish that funding for Navratri continue. She commented that the Navratri grant was currently £67,000 and that if it was to remain in place, suggestions needed to be made as to where savings would come from in respect of other festivals.

The Chair advised the Hindu Council that the report that went to the Executive on this item was publically available and could be accessed through the council's website or a hard copy could be requested from Democratic Services.

In reply to the issues raised, Councillor Powney (Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture) drew Members' attention to the recommendations in the Executive report and in particular the recommendation to approve consultation on the proposals. He advised that a further report with the final recommendations would follow once the results of the consultation had been analysed. He suggested that the points raised by the Hindu Council at the meeting be made during the consultation. Councillor Powney explained that the consultation would not be a simple yes or no vote on proposals but would allow the opportunity for suggestions to be put forward which may result in the proposals being altered. Members noted that as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review announced by the Government, the council was required to make deeper savings more quickly, however it would do all it could to help residents. It was possible that the Navratri grant may not be cut completely but be scaled down depending on the results of the consultation and the council's financial situation. Councillor Powney commented that there may be a number of suggestions made in the consultation with regard to the different festivals and each would be carefully considered.

Councillor Jones (Lead Member for Human Resources and Diversity, Local Democracy and Consultation) also welcomed any suggestions from the Hindu Council and other organisations during the consultation and stated that the consultation would be structured in a way to encourage this. She also welcomed any views in respect of whether funding for Diwali was a priority amongst the community.

Toni McConville (Director of Customer and Community Engagement) advised Members about the draft timetable for the consultation. The committee heard that the consultation documents were being developed and would be completed before the end of February. The consultation documents would then be sent to specific groups involved in the Festivals Programme or on a database of those organisations receiving grants for such activities and in total this involved around 1,000 groups. In addition, there would also be an online survey and meetings with specific groups and stakeholders. The consultation would take place throughout March and April and the final report was due to go to the Executive in June.

The committee then decided not to agree to recommendations put forward by Councillor Lorber to request that the Executive agree to removing options one and two as proposals and that in view of the savings required, the consultation provide the opportunity for participants to indicate what festivals they would choose to continue to receive council funding and support.

RESOLVED:-

that upon considering the report from the Directors of Environment and Neighbourhood Services and Customer and Engagement on the Arts and Festivals Strategy, the decisions made by the Executive be noted.

#### **4.3 Former park keepers' houses at 776 and 778 Harrow Road - disposal in open market**

The reason for the call in was:-

- Report contains no discussion of conditions of sale of land. Call in to discuss the implications of selling the land without such conditions.

Suggested action for the Call In Overview and Scrutiny Committee to take:-

- That the Executive introduce conditions on the sale of the land to limit any development and make it suitable for the area.

Councillor Lorber, one of the councillors who had called in this item, stated that the issue of disposing of the properties had been an issue for some time. Whilst he understood that the reason for disposing of the two houses was to raise funds to invest in Barham Park. However, the original proposals to sell the properties to a local housing association to provide housing from residents being decanted from Barham Park Estate had now been changed to sell the site to the by auction to the highest bidder. Councillor Lorber expressed concern that without conditions being attached to the sale of the site, it could to lead to undesirable developments such as high storey blocks which would be opposed by local residents. He added that this issue was of particular concern as there were proposals for seven to nine storey block of flats in a site adjacent to this one.

In reply to the reasons for the call in, Councillor Crane (Lead Member for Regeneration and Economic Development) advised that the Executive had initially approved disposal of the site subject to Charity Commission approval. However, it had now been clarified that Charity Commission approval was not required and the decision to dispose of the properties by auction would provide the capital receipts, as well as matching funding, necessary to improve Barham Park.

Richard Barrett (Head of Property and Asset Management, Regeneration and Major Projects) added that as the site was held by the Barham Park Estate Trust, of which the council was trustee, approval of the Charity Commission to dispose of the land was not necessary. Richard Barrett advised that placing any condition on selling the site would require the Charity Commission's approval which it was not likely to grant as it would not be perceived as being in the interest of the Trust. The District Valuer had recommended that the council sell the properties as two separate dwellings in order to receive greater capital receipts.

During Members' discussion, Councillor H B Patel acknowledged the reasons given with regard to the sale of the site, however he commented that the council as trustee also had a requirement to look after the interests of local residents. He stated that the Planning Service had expressed the view that the site was appropriate for housing development, however it needed to be acknowledged that

multi storey developments would not be popular with the local residents. Councillor H B Patel sought a response in how making financial gain was balanced with the interest of residents. Councillor Lorber stated that although the site was of significant financial value now, it may not be in years to come and he emphasised the need to undertake measures to protect the future of the site. He felt that it was desirable to provide proper protection to the site by adding conditions for the sale of the properties stating what type of housing would be permitted to be built.

In reply, Richard Barrett advised that arrangements with regard to disposing of the site had been carefully considered and he reiterated the District Valuer's advice that the council sell as two separate dwellings. Members noted that in addition to the likelihood that the Charity Commission would not provide consent to attach conditions to the sale of the site, any decision made by the Charity Commission on this matter may take some time which also would not be in the best interest of the council or the Trust.

The committee then agreed to the Chair's suggestion that the Executive be recommended to introduce conditions on the sale of the land to limit any development and make it suitable for the area.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that upon considering the report from the Director of Regeneration and Major Projects on Former park keepers' houses at 776 and 778 Harrow Road – disposal in open market, the decisions made by the Executive be noted; and
- (ii) that the Executive be requested to introduce conditions on the sale of the land to limit any development and make it suitable for the area.

5. **The Executive list of decisions for the meeting that took place on Monday, 17 January 2011**

RESOLVED:-

that the Executive list of decisions for the meeting that took place on Monday, 17 January 2011 be noted.

6. **Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Call In Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 2 March 2011 at 7.30 pm and would only take place if there were any call ins on decisions from the Executive meeting held on 15 February 2011.

7. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm

A CASTLE  
Chair