

Members' Question Time

Council meeting, Monday 26th January 2004.

1. Councillor Bob Blackman

Recently, one worker was killed and another badly injured during construction work on Wembley Stadium. We express condolences to the families concerned.

What action is Brent Council taking to ensure that the workforce is safe during the remainder of the construction and that there is no repetition of this tragedy?

Response from Councillor Jones:

The tragic accident that occurred early on Thursday 15th January, fatally injuring one worker and seriously injuring another, is under investigation by the Health & Safety Executive and Police.

Responsibility for the health, safety and well being of workers and visitors on construction sites rests in the first instance with the employer/contractor. Jurisdiction for enforcement of the legislation and standards in respect of construction sites is allocated to the Health & Safety Executive((HSE) Government Agency) under the Health & Safety at Work Enforcing Authority Regulations 1998, and not to local authorities. It is this legislation that allocates all workplaces by way of activity type to either the central or local government agencies for enforcement.

As such Brent Council through Health Safety Licensing Unit won't and haven't had any input into workplace safety arrangements at the stadium site. Brent's turn will however, come when the stadium is finished and occupied with responsibility passing to us under the Health & Safety at work Act and Safety of Sports Grounds Act, in respect of both employees and spectators.

2. Councillor Bob Blackman

Redevelopment of Wembley Park, Wembley Central and Wembley Stadium Stations has been promised on a regular basis. When will the work begin, and more importantly, when will it be completed to provide much needed transport improvements for local residents as well as visitors to the Stadium?

Response from Councillor Jones:

Progress on Wembley Station's redevelopment:

Wembley Park Station - Planning consent due 19th February. Physical works are due to start by end of February on two inter-related projects: capacity enhancements for the new stadium and upgrade of station as part of London Underground PPP scheme. Confirmation is awaited on how the target dates for completion will be met i.e.: capacity enhancements by Sep 05, practical completion of remaining elements Dec 05. TfL are consulting on further enhancements to the station including external appearance and improving access for bus passengers and pedestrians. This work will be supplementary to that described above. Its extent and completion date are not yet finalised but will not interfere with the running of the station.

Wembley Central Station - Physical works will start by July 2004 on a new footbridge for event day passengers. This should be complete by the beginning of 2005, followed by station works scheduled to be complete by Sep 05. These will be planned to link into the St Modwen redevelopment programme and will include new access to the station (Station Arcade to be demolished and replaced with new public open space off the High Road), improved security, refurbishment of main platform areas and new staircases/lifts for passengers with disabilities.

Wembley Stadium Station - Planning application to be submitted end of January 04. Physical works to start by October 2004, for completion by September 2005. This will include the new pedestrian bridge linking Wembley Triangle with the main approach to the new Stadium.

Note: Interim minor improvements to passenger facilities were completed in December 2003 at Wembley Central and Wembley Stadium stations. All three stations have funding shortfalls on the full schemes, which need to be resolved.

3. Councillor Paul Lorber

Can the Executive confirm the exact funding offer from the GLA regarding Dollis Hill House, and explain why, if this is not firm funding, they did not give specific authority to the Dollis Hill House Trust to proceed with an Application for Lottery Funding to at least Stage 1?

Response from Councillor Jones:

Officers are arranging to meet with representatives from the GLA to discuss in detail how the GLA can assist financially with restoring Dollis Hill House. This will include discussion on provision of the capital costs for rebuilding the house and also the revenue costs to ensure that the house's future is viable.

Regarding a Dollis Hill House Trust submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Trust has still not provided any additional information to the Council for its consideration, on which a further view could be taken on supporting a Heritage Lottery bid from the Trust for a grant application. For example, members of the Trust indicated earlier in the month that the feasibility study, not presented originally with Trust proposals, would be made available to officers. This is still awaited.

4. Councillor Richard Harrod

What progress has been made on reducing the number of Employment Appeals Tribunals since 1996?

Response from Councillor D Long:

Since October 1999 there has been incremental progress in the organisation in reducing the numbers of employment tribunals involving the Council. The statistics available for the period 1996 to 1999 are composite figures and because of the limited information available for that period the figures cannot be shown for each individual year.

Date	Total no. of cases	No. of cases lost
Nov 96 to Dec 99	116 cases	23
2000	25	2
2001	19	3
2002	12	2
2003	6	1 in part

5. Councillor Helga Gladbaum

How many former Brent employees have been awarded compensation at Employment Appeals Tribunals on grounds of unlawful racial discrimination since 1996 and how many of those cases related to the period 1991-1996?

Response from Councillor D Long:

There are no statistics available in the Council for the period 1991 to 1996 to enable us to collate monitoring information in regard to employment tribunal cases lost against Brent Council including those cases lost on the grounds of race discrimination.

With the emphasis on the corporate HR function since 1999 the process of collating statistics information and analysing employee applications to the Employment Tribunal began in December 1999. The first exercise covered

the period November 1996 to December 1999. For that period the analysis showed that the Council lost 16 Employment Tribunal cases on the grounds of race discrimination.

For the period January 2000 to date, the Council has lost 2 employment tribunal cases on the grounds of race discrimination.

6. Councillor Neil Nerva

Please can you provide an update about the Kensal Rise area (Chamberlayne Road / Station Terrace). When will a report be presented to Cabinet detailing long term plans ? What discussions have been held with Groundwork about the use of SRB grant ?

Response from Councillor Jones:

Kensal Rise Station – Groundwork.

Following initial site meetings with Groundwork on 12 November 2003, discussions are continuing on provision of improvements to be provided by Groundwork. This will utilise funding which will be available for this project in the 2004/5 financial year.

We are also in discussion with London Buses and Metrolink about the need to make satisfactory provision for all buses and crews which use Kensal Rise Station as a terminus. London Buses is planning a drivers' restroom which will redevelop an existing derelict building in Station Terrace adjacent to the Station entrance during the next few months.

The restoration of this building is likely to be welcomed by both residents and ward councillors who have raised concerns about it as a blot on the Kensal Rise Station area landscape for some time.

7. Councillor Chandubhai Patel

With the Council's tendering exercise finding concerns raised by ourselves and Community organisations about the quality, quantity and nutritional value of the Council's frozen meals to be accurate, will the Lead Member accept these meals have been unacceptable and allow a return to fresh meals to safeguard quality and health?

Response from Councillor Fox:

To improve efficiency, the meals service has made a number of changes over the past 5 years. These were required in a Best Value Review action plan to provide a cost-effective and consistent service and to address health and safety concerns.

Providing freshly prepared, and frozen/regenerated meals in the same kitchen is not practicable. The previous freshly prepared service did not operate at weekends and there were health and safety concerns about freezing/reheating those meals.

If the service provided all meals freshly prepared at least £500,000 would be required for staffing, kitchen equipment and additional premises because of more space being needed.

It is because the meals tenderers have not met all the stringent requirements of the Council's tendering exercise and taking account of comments received, that it has been agreed to seek other providers in order to provide a quality service.

As other boroughs provide frozen regenerated meals to high standards, I am confident Brent will achieve this through a process of negotiation, so we can continue to provide a satisfactory service, as well as taking into account the range of comments received.

8. Councillor Suresh Kansagra

Since 1996 Brent's schools have had less funds to spend.

Can the Lead Member assure me that the gap between the devolved fund to schools and the retained fund of the LEA is not widening and what action is being taken to reduce this gap as part of the budget process?

Response from Councillor Lyon:

Since 1996 Brent schools have had increasing funding. The year on year overall increases in school funding have, as a minimum, covered the impact of inflation.

The ISB in 2003/4 is £122,457,000. The ISB as a percentage of the overall school budget is 88.7%. Compared to other LEAs, this is a high percentage. However, it is not practical to give a like for like comparative figure for 1996 owing to numerous changes in formula calculations.

As things currently stand, the ISB for 2004/5, which was notified to ministers in December, is £131,518,000 – 88.2% of the forecast school budget.

We do not set an explicit objective for the percentages of funds devolved to schools or retained centrally. Rather, this pattern of spending, so long as it meets government guidelines, must be determined by the needs of Brent's pupils. Note that centrally retained spending covers direct spending on education for pupils in such areas as: provision for pupils with statements;

fees for pupils at independent and out-borough schools; pupil referral units; education for children out of school; nursery education and Excellence in Cities grant for schools, all of which are vital to the efficient functioning of our schools and raising standards. Central LEA spending is particularly important for achieving the Council's corporate objectives relating to under-achieving and vulnerable children.

For 2004-05, the schools budget as set in December includes an increased growth of £2 million to meet unavoidable special needs pressures. There is no alternative to funding these pressures.

Even so, as it currently stands, the like for like increase in the devolved budget is 5.9%, well above expected schools inflation of 3.4%.

9. Councillor Irwin Van Colle

The Brent Magazine, which has now produced 32 issues, is printed bi-monthly, is very glossy and full of pictures.

Could the Lead Member inform me how many copies are produced, how many copies are wasted and dumped in the re-cycling bin and how much this on-going edition costs the council?

Response from Councillor Beswick:

The Brent Magazine:

1. The Brent Magazine is the key vehicle that the council uses to communicate with local residents.
2. 105,000 copies of The Brent Magazine are printed every two months, of which 98,000 are distributed to households. The remainder are sent to libraries, one stop shops and other council offices.
3. The council allocated £106,000 to Communications and Consultation for production of the magazine in 2003/04. This means that the total cost of production and distribution is less than 17 pence per copy.
4. It is read by far more people than the local press. This provides good value for money.
5. The Resident's Attitude Survey carried out by independent market researchers MORI in 2002 concluded that Brent communicates pretty well and that The Brent Magazine does a good job. Figures from the survey show:
 - 62 per cent of residents say that The Brent Magazine contains a lot of useful information.

- 50 per cent of residents say that they get most of their information about the council from The Brent Magazine. Only 17 per cent of local people said they got the same type of information from the two key local papers.
- 39 per cent of residents say that they would most like to get information about the council from The Brent Magazine.

10. Councillor Valerie Brown

Can the Lead Member confirm the number of people in Bed and Breakfast Hotel or Hostel Accommodation inside Brent, the number in Hotels or Hostels outside Brent; the average cost of each placement; and how all these figures compare with figures for January 2001, 2002 and 2003?

Response from Councillor Thomas:

As of the 11th January 2004 there were 220 households in B&B hotel or hostel accommodation, of which 3 households were placed outside of the Borough. The average cost of a hotel placement was £218 per week, and the average HB Deficit was approximately £2,000 per annum. This Housing Benefit Deficit is the cost that falls on the General Fund that is not met from Housing Benefit subsidy.

In January 2001, there were 547 households in hotel or hostel accommodation, of which 193 were placed outside the Borough. The average cost of a hotel placement was £238 per week, and the average Housing Benefit Deficit was just under £5,000 per annum.

In January 2002, there were 752 households accommodated in hotel or hostel accommodation, of which 294 were placed outside the borough. The average cost of a hotel placement was £244 per week, and the average HB Deficit was approximately £3,500 per annum.

In January 2003 there were 531 households accommodated in hotel or hostel accommodation, of which 113 were placed outside the Borough. The average cost of a hotel placement was £235 per week, and the average HB Deficit was approximately £2,800 per annum.

Thank you for raising this matter with me.