

**Council meeting, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2004.**

**Members' Question Time**

The following questions have been selected in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 39, permitting the Members listed to ask a supplementary question relating to the subject matter of their original question:

*The two questions nominated by the Leader of the Conservative Group:*

**1. Councillor Bob Blackman**

**Residents have been receiving a poor service with respect to refuse collection. Can the Lead Member confirm that Onyx is using an old fleet of vehicles that frequently break down and cause a backlog? What action is proposed by the Lead Member to resolve this unacceptable poor service?**

*Response to Question 1:*

Onyx deploys 19 vehicles per day on the domestic refuse service, with a handful of spare vehicles to cover breakdowns and servicing. Of the 19, the oldest is three and a half years old. Three new vehicles are due for delivery at the end of July to replace the older vehicles and improve the age profile of the spare vehicles. Regrettably, vehicle breakdowns have affected some of the newer vehicles and not just the older ones. The matter continues to be addressed by Onyx with the vehicle suppliers, and has been discussed between Onyx officials and Brent officers at both operational and management levels. Resolving the vehicle reliability issue will considerably improve the service and we remain committed to keeping the pressure on Onyx to achieve this and other parts of the contract. An action plan is expected following a recent meeting with Onyx senior management. A group comprising Brent senior officers and members meets regularly to monitor the Onyx performance.

**2. Councillor Van Colle**

**Can the Lead Member tell me if the Wembley Parking Scheme as proposed for consultation at Highways on 15<sup>th</sup> June will be imposed when the residents of Brent reject it?**

*Response to Question 2:*

The Highways Committee on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2004 instructed officers to carry out consultation with regard to the Wembley Stadium event day protective parking scheme. Ward councillors had previously been issued with a draft of the consultation material for comment and discussion with residents' associations, as appropriate. Committee agreed to a six week period of consultation over

July and August, the results of which will be reported to Highways Committee in September.

At that stage, officers will be able to provide advice to members as to the effectiveness and legality of the measures preferred, or suggested, by respondents. Members of the Highways Committee will be asked to make decisions on implementation as appropriate, in the light of the consultation, and in the light of responsibilities falling to them in respect of the Council as Highways and Traffic Authority, and the Council as responsible for delivering the relevant conditions of the New Wembley Stadium planning agreement. The responses of residents can only be analysed and assessed after the consultation of over 90,000 residents has taken place. Perhaps Councillor Van Colle will share the skills of telepathy in his prediction on how over 90,000 residents will respond.

*The one question nominated by Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group:*

### **3. Councillor Paul Lorber**

**How many applications for Blue Badges have there been in the last 12 months; how many people were assessed; what is the average waiting time for assessment; how many cases were approved and rejected; and how do these figures and Brent's approach differ from other nearby Councils ?**

*Response to Question 3:*

Older People Services received 3051 applications in the last 12 months. 1866 badges were issued under the automatic criteria which are that the applicant must be at least one of the following:

- Registered Blind under the National Assistance Act 1948;
- In receipt of Mobility Allowance or the higher rate of mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance;
- In receipt of Attendance Allowance at the higher rate ;
- Use a motor vehicle supplied for a disabled person by a Government Health Department;
- In receipt of a Government Grant towards their own vehicle;
- Receiving a War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement;
- Registered within Category 1 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Users Act 1970 as a person with a permanent and substantial disability which severely affects their mobility.

793 applicants were successful after attending a mobility assessment and meeting the eligibility criteria of having a permanent and substantial disability which causes inability to walk or very considerable difficulty in walking. 381 were refused as not meeting the discretionary criteria.

The average waiting time for an assessment is 4 – 6 weeks.

The Disabled Persons Advisory Transport Committee believed that many of the people being issued with a disabled badge under the discretionary criteria should not have been judged eligible. With the introduction of Blue Badges in April 2000, it was agreed to review the scheme to try to ensure that only those applicants who meet the criteria are given badges and Brent applicants, not automatically entitled to a Blue Badge, are now interviewed by a trained mobility assessor. Where authorities have adopted these national criteria (such as in Brent) the number of badges on issue has reduced. Our Blue Badge Team do their utmost to ensure that assessments are carried out in a fair and sympathetic manner.

With regard to comparisons with nearby councils, our Officers are making contact with neighbouring boroughs to get up to date information and will inform Cllr Lorber in due course.

*The 3 questions selected from Labour Backbench Members:*

#### **4. Councillor Nerva**

**How is Brent Council working with Brent PCT to increase the take up of MMR vaccine in the area covered by Kilburn and Kensal Area Forum? How are nursery and primary schools being involved in the campaign to ensure the effective take up of MMR vaccine for children starting education ?**

*Response to Question 4:*

The uptake of MMR vaccination in south east Brent is significantly below the national average, and has become dangerously low. There were 6 cases of measles in Brent in 2003. Children who catch measles can become seriously ill, and some will suffer permanent damage to their health.

Parents who deliberately do not vaccinate their children are taking avoidable risks with their own and other children's health.

Brent PCT currently promotes MMR vaccination via the traditional routes of clinics and vaccination nurses. Schools are not involved with the MMR vaccination programme. However, Brent Council LEA would support any proposals from the PCT for a wider strategy involving schools.

#### **5. Councillor J Long**

**There is a high demand for housing in Brent and the Council has brought several hundred empty properties back into use to provide housing over the past few years. How many properties have been made available for housing under the Council's Compulsory Purchase Order policy?**

*Response to Question 5:*

There have been no properties brought back into use using Compulsory Purchase Orders over the past few years. Housing officers recall 1 being completed between 2 and 5 years ago.

A number of notices have been issued but landlords have then taken advantage of the grants system and the properties have been brought back into use. Only 2 Boroughs use CPOs routinely; Newham and Westminster. The threat of a CPO usually results in the private sale of the premises although if a property is purchased it is quickly sold to a Housing Association and becomes a unit of social housing for the foreseeable future.

## **6. Councillor Gladbaum**

### **What progress has been made on implementing the provisions of the Children's Bill?**

*Response to Question 6:*

The Executive Committee on 26<sup>th</sup> April agreed to the following recommendations regarding the Children's Bill;

- Endorse the main proposals of the bill, namely;
  - The five outcomes for children and young people;
    - being healthy
    - staying safe
    - enjoying and achieving
    - making a positive contribution
    - social and economic well being
  - The duty of all partners to cooperate and make partnership arrangements
  - The vesting of the responsibility for the oversight and coordination of Children's Services in Brent with the Council as Local Authority
  - The creation of a shared information system
  - The integration of services for children across education, social care and health including joint-commissioning, pooled budgets, multi-agency training and multi-agency teams with designated key workers
  - The designation of a Lead Member for Children's Services
  - The designation of a Director for Children's Services.
- Approve the principle of maximum operational integration and minimum organisational disruption in approaching the implementation of the Bill's proposals.
- Endorse the establishment of a Member / Officer Steering Group, led by the Leader and Chief Executive, to oversee the implementation of the proposals and to ensure that all service areas of the Council are fully

involved in the implementation / development of the proposals. This has been established.

- Approve the establishment of a Children's Services Partnership Board to be responsible for the integration of Children's Services to be co-chaired by the Director of EAL and Director of Social Services. The Board will invite formal representation at a senior level from the PCT, the two NHS Trusts and the Voluntary Sector. The Board will commission work for sub-groups such as the Children and Young People's Priority Action Group. It will liaise with the Local Strategic Partnerships. The first meeting is expected in September.
- Vest responsibility for the development of Children's Services with the Directors of EAL and Social Services as the core members of the Partnership Board with identified areas of responsibility under joint-working arrangements.
- Approve the appointment of a Children's Service Project Manager to be responsible to the Board for the implementation of the Children's Bill proposals. Resources for this position have been identified in the current year.
- Plan to appoint a Director of Children's Services in the financial year 2006/7 subject to the enactment of related proposals in the Bill.
- Establish a Brent Partnership Framework covering the main agencies responsible for Children's Services; it is proposed that this be established in the financial year 2006/7, drawing on experience of the Partnership Board, pilot Children's Trusts and integration models in other Local Authorities.
- Consider appointing a Lead Member for Children's Services in the municipal year 2005/6.
- Request the submission of a costed project plan for the implementation of the Children's Bill proposals in the financial years 2004/5 and 2005/6, to be submitted to a future Executive meeting. This is on the forward plan for the August Executive.
- Approve the development of the Area Child Protection Committee into a Local Safeguarding Board by April 2005 or earlier if possible; a further report will be submitted on this proposal.

Work on the project plan is still progressing and will be submitted to the Executive in August.

*The 4 questions selected by way of ballot:*

## **7. Councillor Lemmon**

**In the light of the successful launch of the Brent Fairtrade Network in March, will the Executive consider ways of sustaining this ongoing campaign within the Council and the borough as a whole as an example of effective community leadership and partnership working?**

*Response to Question 7:*

On behalf of the Executive and the Council we extend our congratulations to Cllr. Lemmon for championing this cause not only within the Council but throughout the borough of Brent and furthermore we wish every success to Brent Fairtrade Network in the future.

The executive agrees with Cllr. Lemmon that this can be an area where the Council can show community leadership and create effective working partnerships to achieve the aims of a worthwhile cause.

Therefore, members of the executive would request a meeting with Cllr. Lemmon and Brent Fairtrade Network to discuss the issues, practicalities and respective roles in taking forward and publicising this worthy campaign not only within the Council but also within the wider community of Brent.

## **8. Councillor Taylor**

**When is Rydal Gardens going to be resurfaced, as the residents' complaints have been going on for years? There have been promises in the past but meanwhile the holes get bigger and bigger. Can the Council give a guarantee that this road will be on the list for 2004/2005?**

*Response to Question 8:*

The carriageway resurfacing programme is brought to Highways Committee for approval each year, so that site works can start early in the new financial year. A considerable amount of consultation takes place to ensure that the available funding is used efficiently and effectively. Highways engineers draw upon the maintenance records of the previous year, including the notification of defects from the general public. Ward Councillors are asked to list roads they would like to see inspected. An independent survey is then undertaken in February of each year and an empirical method is used to assess the condition of each road for comparison purposes. In drawing up recommendations, some account is also taken of the volume and type of pedestrian and vehicular traffic expected on any particular road. In the 2004 survey, Rydal Gardens, Wembley, was listed at 100<sup>th</sup> position in the priorities list. Typically, work will be undertaken in the first 20 roads in the priority list, with work on reserve sites if funds allow. Rydal Gardens will not be resurfaced in the financial year 2004/05 but will be resurveyed in February

2005. The Council's highways engineers will, in the meantime, inspect the road to remedy any potholes or other defects which fall within the approved criteria. This year, the Administration has committed over £3.8 million for carriageway and footway repairs. This marks a second year of a substantial increase in capital and revenue funding to enhance the street scene and improve pedestrian and vehicle safety.

#### **9. Councillor B M Patel**

**Please explain the council's policy concerning the bituminous macadam overlay on roads which have completely worn away from the surface of the road leaving the original concrete, is this ground for remedial work to be carried out? Is it correct that frost and rain will erode untreated joints of roads?**

*Response to Question 9:*

The Borough's roads have two types of construction, rigid or flexible. The majority of roads are of flexible construction with granular foundations and bituminous upper layers. Rigid roads are typically constructed in reinforced concrete. There are rigid roads in some residential estates, and rigid road construction also comprises some service roads. Traffic was intended to run on the textured concrete surface. Construction joints and expansion joints were suitably sealed to allow movement whilst preventing egress of water and ice. Over the lifetime of these concrete roads, boroughs have overlain the concrete with thin bitumen coatings in order to improve the running service, reduce traffic noise, and to prevent water penetration. In a number of situations, the thin bitumen has worn away giving a mottled appearance and uneven surface. Due to the fact that the overlay was a thin layer, the loss of bitumen did not present a safety hazard which prioritised the road for resurfacing or reconstruction, and which would have diverted highway maintenance funds from more pressing work. However, in the current financial year the Council has provided significantly more funding for carriageway maintenance, and the Executive at its meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2004 approved expenditure of £100k for remedial works to spalled concrete roads. A programme of work is now being undertaken to address these issues. Four roads will be resurfaced this financial year. This programme is to continue into the next and future years, as funding permits.

#### **10. Councillor Mrs Fernandes**

**Could the Lead Member inform me of any positive steps that are to be taken to assist those voluntary groups who sadly have had their transport funding taken away? Smaller groups are very shocked when finding that the Council funding has been withdrawn and will now have to fold.**

*Response to Question 10:*

With regards to the steps taken to assist voluntary groups that no longer qualify for Social Services funding, the Department has provided the following advice and assistance to various groups over the last few months:

- a. Funding to all 22 organisations has been extended to June 2004, so that other possible mechanisms and sources of funding to continue service provision can be identified.
- b. Through our arrangements with Brent Community Transport (BCT) all groups are eligible for a subsidised transport from this organisation. BCT offer more competitive rates than other local transport organisations and to date Wembley Glad Club, Red Cross, Wembley Care Society and Starfish Swimming Club have been referred to them.
- c. We have given organisations access to the 'Grantnet Fund Finder' database, which can be accessed free of charge via Brent Internet. The database provides up-to-date information on funding and grants, and allows organisations to search and apply for funding opportunities across the country.
- d. We have met with the Red Cross Disabled Club to discuss how they can reduce their transport expenditure. Although this group did not meet all the criteria they have agreed to review their operation and as a result may become eligible for funding.
- e. There is a possibility that the transport of some of the organisations can also be met at no extra cost within our current arrangements with Brent Transport Service. This is being explored.
- f. Organisations have been asked to explore the possibility for service users to use taxi card, dial a ride services or community bus schemes.

I realise that some organisations are disappointed by this decision and Social Services will continue to work with them, in order that a satisfactory conclusion can be reached to ensure the continuation of service regardless of the withdrawal of the grant.