

Extract from Minutes - Council Meeting 27th November 2006**FIRST READING DEBATE ON 2007/08 TO 2010/11 BUDGET****15. 1st Reading Debate - 2007-08 to 2010-11 Budget**

The Deputy Leader (Lead Member for Resources), Councillor Blackman introduced the reports of the Executive and Director of Finance and Corporate Resources. The report of the Executive set out the Administration's top priorities for action and spending in 2007/08. It pointed out that earlier in the year the borough had voted for change with one of the key areas of change being in the approach to the Green Agenda. The report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources presented the best information available to the Council at the present time. One significant area of uncertainty was the Primary Care Trust (PCT) finances. Further cuts approved by the PCT Board on 23rd November 2006 would have serious adverse implications both for the finances of the Council and for services received by residents. He pointed out that Appendix 1 to the report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources showed that with the maximum permitted Council Tax increase of 5% an additional £21M was needed based on current spending. If there was to be no Council Tax increase £25M was needed. The new Administration had made a start at examining very closely all the spending plans and options for the Council.

Councillor Blackman stated that it was anticipated that the Council would remain at the floor for the purposes of the grant settlement which would mean an inflation only increase. He accused the previous Administration of not making proper provision for children and adult care services and that budgetary pressure had been allowed to build up. Efforts were already being made to address these overspends and he commended officers on the actions taken in attempting to bring the budgets back into line. Councillor Blackman stated that 2% efficiency savings had been identified and brought forward into this financial year. Nevertheless spending pressures were building up and the papers showed a growth list amounting to £12M which could not all be met. The papers also included a list of savings proposals most of which would have to be taken if the Council was going to balance its budget. The spending cuts approved by the PCT would undermine efforts by the Council to formulate a reasonable budget and that was why the message to the PCT had to be that the Council would not co-operate on making the cuts it proposed. Without government intervention the Council would be in a very serious financial position if the PCT cost shunting proposals happened.

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor John, stated that it was her understanding that following Councillor Lorber's representations to the PCT Board it had been agreed that a check would be made on the accuracy of the £9.8M the Council claimed the PCT owed to it, referred to earlier in the General Debate. This had been found to be true but the Board believed that the Council owed the PCT £7M so she submitted that constructive discussions were needed to resolve the position. Councillor John stated that

every budget was a difficult exercise. She asked that the final budget make adequate provision for the development of children centres and that money be identified to fulfil the agreed improvements to Roe Green Park.

Councillor R Moher referred to Hay Lane School which provided for young people with learning disabilities. She stated that the school building was not fit for purpose, not designed to make wheelchair use easy, lacked storage facilities and that the school could not continue to operate from such premises. A figure of £5M had been identified to bring the building up to standard and Councillor Moher urged that this commitment be honoured.

Councillor Kansagra referred to a stretch of Preston Road at its junctions with The Avenue and Preston Way which was very busy and difficult for school children and the elderly to cross. He asked for a pedestrian crossing facility to be installed. He also asked for resources to deal with young people causing a nuisance on motorbikes in the Barnhill open space and Fryent Country Park.

Councillor Arnold asked that the £200,000 growth identified for the youth service be sustained. She referred to the action plan for improvement which identified a need for these resources. She saw it as an invest to save approach because intervention at an earlier stage could prevent problems developing later in a young persons life. She made reference to the Kilburn area where a lack of youth workers was being matched by an increase in street crime. Councillor Arnold submitted that because of a lack of facilities the young were vulnerable to drug traffickers. She asked specifically that some funding be directed towards providing premises in the area from where various youth activities could be co-ordinated.

Councillor Mistry referred to the Queensbury area of the borough she represented and the many school children and the elderly who travelled on foot in the area. She asked that attention be paid to ensuring the pavements were maintained and adequate pedestrian crossing facilities were provided. Councillor Mistry stated that she had heard it said by a Council official that any new swimming pool built in the borough would not be in the Kingsbury area. She argued against this and suggested no more money should be spent on Roe Green Park until an evaluation of the current improvements was undertaken and the view of the police was sought on the anti social behaviour taking place in the park.

Councillor Beswick proposed that the Council earmark £5,000 to spend on commemorating the abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 on 25th March 2007. Additional funding could be sought from the Heritage Lottery fund and Councillor Beswick submitted that it would be very appropriate for a borough like Brent to put on such an event.

Councillor Farrell made a plea for the continued improvement and maintenance of the borough's parks. She made particular reference to Welsh Harp and hoped that stated commitments to the parks would be kept. She also referred to the provision of park wardens introduced by the last

Administration and expressed the hope that they would be retained by the new Administration.

Councillor Dunwell expressed concern that some of the cuts referred to in the reports would affect provision of the infrastructure necessary to allow planning permissions to be granted for the regeneration of the borough. He questioned the method adopted over the years for achieving savings by requiring an across the board percentage reduction and felt this was the wrong approach. Instead he suggested what was needed was for a team of people to be charged with analysing each service area budget drawing on the expert advice of officers but not necessarily using their suggestions to achieve savings.

Councillor Jones asked that CCTV be provided in the Willesden Green area and that the controlled drinking zone in Kilburn be extended into Willesden and suggested that it be taken up to the North Circular Road thereby providing a buffer to prevent moving the problem into neighbouring areas.

Councillor Ahmed asked the Executive to reconsider the offer from the Mayor of London to match fund the restoration of Dollis Hill House. Councillor Coughlin referred to the growth in the youth service budget being clawed back in the current financial year and asked that this be re-instated next year. He also asked that the redevelopment of Barham Park Estate be speeded up. Councillor Coughlin pointed out that before the PCT issue had been known about decisions had already been made to re-introduce day care charges and increase parking charges. As these were decisions based on local factors he asked that they be reversed. He also spoke in support of maintaining in real terms the funding of the voluntary sector. Finally he warned against taking a confrontational view of the PCT and urged the Council to recognise the PCT as a partner agency.

Councillor D Brown referred to comments made at the meeting about the provision of school places and pointed out that the simplest way of providing extra places was to expand existing successful schools but that the government would not allow the Council to do this. He criticised the plan to redevelop Barham Park estate by building on part of the Barham Park open space. Councillor Brown also questioned the claim that funding for improvements to Roe Green Park had been built into the budget under the previous Administration.

Councillor J Long asked that the Council keep its commitment to supporting the provision of allotments and also provide toilet facilities on site and offer the option of greenhouses instead of huts. She referred to the report from the Lead Member for Housing explaining the Council's new approach to housing provision. Given the proposal to build intermediate housing she asked where people on small incomes who were on the housing waiting list would be housed. She hoped the post of Empty Property Grant Surveyor included in the list of additional savings option for 2007-08 would not be taken. Councillor Long added that the condition of Craven Park Road was no longer enhanced by the four pieces of art work and asked that they be removed.

Councillor CJ Patel asked for a pedestrian pelican crossing on The Harrow Road Wembley sorting office in light of the children who crossed the road at this point going to Barham Park and the bus stops in the area that created pedestrian movement.

Councillor Hashmi spoke of his concern over the provision of school places and urged the Council to do all it could to make places available for all Brent children.

Councillor Fox referred to a letter sent to staff at Carlyon Print setting out options for its future. The Council was going to have to take a decision on this matter and he urged that sufficient funds be made available to ensure the employees of Carlyon Print were supported, having due regard to the many years of service they had given in the borough. It was important that the Council recognised its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Councillor J Moher referred to the huge gap between income and expenditure in the budget projections shown in Appendix 1 to the report of the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources but submitted that this was not unusual at this stage of the budget deliberations and that the gap would close as time went on. Although recognising the importance of the proposals of the PCT, Councillor Moher felt the Council should avoid a blame culture developing and continue to discuss the issues with the PCT. Councillor Moloney raised the issue of the relocation of residents in Melrose House. He stated that the residents and their families were upset at the proposals because the residents tended to get on well with each other and had access to a park across the road all of which would be lost if they were moved. He urged that further discussions with the residents and their families take place and the possible redevelopment of the Melrose House site be considered. Councillor Moloney also asked for CCTV to be provided on the Stonebridge estate now that the redevelopment had created a wider estate. He suggested that a partnership approach to this could be pursued.

Councillor Lorber acknowledged the importance of some of the issues raised. Whilst noting the individual contributions of Members he spoke further on the funding issue with the PCT. If it was the case that the Council owed the PCT money he asked why there had been no provision made for this in past budgets. He re-iterated the Council's resolve to recover the money owed to it by the PCT. He pointed out that a lot of the cuts proposed by the PCT were to services provided jointly with the Council. The PCT had a responsibility for joint working as well as the Council. The effects on services would be felt by the people of the borough who would not understand the funding issues between the Council and the PCT. Councillor Lorber stated that if the PCT were minded to cut services and shunt costs on to other health providers or the Council then he would call into question the existence of the PCT. Finally, Councillor Lorber stated that there was not a budget for Dollis Hill House and he pointed out that the offer of financial assistance from the Mayor of London was itself dependent on the production of a viable business plan.

RESOLVED:-

that the reports from the Executive and the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources on the 1st Reading of the 2007/08 Budget be noted and that the views submitted by Members during the course of the 1st Reading Debate be referred to the Executive to determine those to which it wishes to give further consideration.