

Extract from Minutes - Council Meeting 26th November 2007**FIRST READING DEBATE ON 2008/09 TO 2011/12 BUDGET****7. 1st Reading Debate – 2008- 09 to 2011-12 Budget**

The Leader, Councillor Lorber 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, and reflected on the achievements over the past year. 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. The Comprehensive Spending Review set out the funding that local government could expect over the next three years. For 2008/09 the expected national increase in funding for local authorities was 3.8% which translated into an increase of 1% in real terms over the assumed inflation rate of 2.75%; the increases for 2009/10 and 2010/11 were 2.8% and 2.6% respectively. The Council would be clearer about its funding once the provisional local government finance settlement was announced in late November or early December. There was also expected to be significant changes in the treatment of specific grants which were expected to be announced as part of the settlement. In addition, there still remained uncertainty about PCT costs transferring to the Council. Councillor Lorber moved that the outcome of the 1st reading be referred to the Budget Panel and stated that the Administration was determined to deliver on its priorities. He outlined the progress made in achieving cleaner streets, favouring smaller cars, improving schooling, listening to residents over their concerns regarding safety and security, increasing recycling, investing in the library service, transforming the provision of social services, increasing the opportunities for physical exercise, getting 1300 people into employment through Brent in2work and realising £2M a year in efficiency gains above the Government target. Councillor Lorber then focused on the four priority areas for the Administration. A continued effort would be made to tackle crime. Further regeneration of the borough would take place, with particular reference to the North Circular Road and the severe health issues facing people who lived in its vicinity. Attention would be given to the needs of youth and young people with specific reference to crime and young people being a victim of crime particularly on the way to and from school. There would also be action on tackling environmental issues and increasing sustainability. He finished by saying that it was the Administration's ambition to deliver on its priorities despite the poor financial settlement from the Government.

Councillor Blackman stated that this was the opportunity for members to give their opinions on what they saw as the priorities for inclusion in the budget but he gave a word of warning that, despite the Council last year agreeing a balanced budget, it soon faced mounting pressures on it as set out in paragraph 4.3 of the Director of Finance and Corporate Resource's report. He felt that the anticipated grant settlement was an outrage which would mean the Council facing the choice of either increasing Council Tax or cutting

services. The Council had previously undertaken not to increase the Council Tax only for the PCT to pass on costs to the Council and now the Council was faced with having to find £9.4M in savings if there was not to be an increase in the Council Tax. He urged members to consider the Council's financial position when contributing to the debate. Councillor Blackman stated his intention to ensure a balanced budget was agreed with as low a level of increase in the Council Tax as possible and a resolution of the PCT position.

Having earlier left the Chamber there was no contribution from the Leader of the Labour Group.

Other members of the Executive added their views on the achievements of the Administration over the last year and outlined their portfolio priorities for the next year and beyond. In addition, Councillor Colwill outlined the efforts he was making to provide a borough wide increase in facilities for young people, especially those newly arrived in the borough and asked for support on this. He also asked that consideration be given to providing £58,000 for the provision of a playground in Woodcock Park for use by children with disabilities. Councillor Van Colle stated that it would be necessary to get people to recognise that being a good citizen would mean recycling as much as possible and that increasing recycling was a major a major challenge for the Council.

Councillor Joseph referred to the level of crime in Kensal Green and stated that many residents had said they would feel safer if there were more CCTV cameras in the area. She also felt the Council should provide more facilities for young people in partnership with other agencies. Councillor Joseph added that the Kensal Green area needed extra money spent on it and stated that there was a lot of broken paving and many roads in the area that needed resurfacing. Whilst acknowledging that the Council had a priority programme for resurfacing works she felt there needed to be an extra pot of money which could be used in an area that might be felt to missing out on the programme. She also asked for increased spending on drainage in the area to avoid a repeat of the floods and for more alleygating.

Councillor Kansagra felt that the youth in the Barnhill area had little to do and few places to play. He asked for the reinstatement of the tennis courts, provision of a multi use games area and football posts within Barn Hill playing fields. He felt this would have the effect of reducing the incidence of crime and child obesity.

Councillor Dunwell felt there was more opportunity for the Council to generate income by using the expertise within the Council's workforce more fully. He also referred to the loss of employment areas within the Borough despite substantial housing development bringing young people in to the Borough. He referred to the threat to the units at Alpine House and felt investment in such buildings was needed.

Councillor Bessong referred to local services facing closure because of the PCT cuts despite them meeting the needs identified as priorities by the

Government such as support to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies. He supported the calls for greater investment in services for young people.

Councillor Mistry stated that she wanted to see the Eaton Grove area in Queensbury turned into a safer area from the current position where young people tended to congregate in the area. She asked that the area of Queensbury be included in the programme for the regeneration of the borough's parks by investing in Eaton Grove Park.

Councillor Dunn felt there was an opportunity to save money by properly locating street signs and lampposts rather than at present when it was frequently necessary to get them relocated. He felt better management of the process was needed.

RESOLVED:-

that the reports from the Executive and the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources on the 1st Reading of the 2008/09 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 consideration.