

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

At an **ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL** of the **LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT** held at Brent Town Hall, Forty Lane, Wembley, Middlesex on **Monday, 30th June 2008 at 7.15 pm**

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor Fox

The Deputy Mayor
Councillor O'Sullivan

Councillors:

Ahmed	Jackson
Allie	John
Arnold	Jones
Mrs Bacchus	Joseph
Baker	Kansagra
Bessong	Leaman
Beswick	J Long
Blackman	Lorber
D Brown	Malik
V Brown	Matthews
Butt	Mendoza
Castle	Mistry
Chavda	J Moher
Clues	R Moher
Colwill	Moloney
Corcoran	Motley
Coughlin	Pagnamenta
Crane	CJ Patel
Detre	H B Patel
Dunn	Powney
Dunwell	Sneddon
Eniola	Steel
Farrell	Tancred
Mrs U Fernandes	Thomas
Green	Van Colle
Gupta	Van Kalwala
Hashmi	Wharton
Hirani	

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cummins, HM Patel, Ms Shaw and Singh.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meetings**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meetings of full Council held on 3rd March, 14th May and 19th May 2008 be confirmed as true and accurate records.

3. **Declarations of Interests**

At this meeting there were none.

4. **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor announced that his second charity for his Mayoral Year would be BANG Edutainment/Life FM which he explained was an extremely worthy local charity for young people to gain qualifications in media training. He added that along with Age Concern Brent, his year would focus on respect and dignity amongst the young and old.

The Mayor reported that the Council had successfully concluded the purchase of a 2.5 acre site on Arena Square in Wembley for its new Civic Centre. He added that the site would place the Council at the heart of the Wembley regeneration area and enable the Council to provide much-improved services to residents, elected members and Council staff.

The Mayor announced that the Local Government Minister John Healey had signed off the 35 targets in Brent's Local Area Agreement. The agreement was drafted in conjunction with the Council's partners on the Local Strategic Partnership and strongly reflected the four major themes in the Council's Corporate Strategy.

5. **Appointments to Committees/Appointment of Chairs/Vice Chairs**

RESOLVED:-

that the following appointments be made:

Committee/Body	Appointment
Planning Committee	Councillor Malik to fill vacancy
Planning Committee	Councillor Powney in place of Councillor Butt
Planning Committee	Councillor Eniola in place of Councillor Powney as 1 st alternate

	to Councillor Singh
Planning Committee	Councillor Green in place of Councillor Hirani
Planning Committee	Councillor CJ Patel in place of Councillor Green as 1 st alternate to Councillor Green
Planning Committee	Councillor Hirani in place of Councillor CJ Patel as 2 nd alternate to Councillor Green
Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Mrs Shalla Tabi to fill non-voting co-opted position representing the Muslim faith
General Purposes Committee	Councillor Sneddon in place of Councillor D Brown
Kingsbury & Kenton Area Consultative Forum	Councillor Mistry (chair) in place of Councillor Mrs Fernandes
Private Sector Housing Consultative Forum	Councillor HB Patel as chair
Fostering Panel	Councillor Hirani in place of Councillor Wharton

6. Question time

The following five questions were selected by the Leader of the Labour Group.

Growth of weeds on pavements and gulleys in Fryent ward

The question from Councillor Crane had asked when some action would be taken to tackle the growth of weeds on pavements and gulleys in Fryent ward. He added that local residents were not receiving a satisfactory service from the contractor and as a supplementary question asked how much compensation Veolia had paid for the failure to provide the service and how much would be returned to Council tax payers in Fryent for services not received.

Councillor D Brown replied that as his original answer had indicated resident satisfaction had risen as a result of an increased programme of street cleaning. He was unable to reveal the levels of compensation paid by the contractor because of commercial confidence but the Council was in discussion with the contractor and he asserted the streets were cleaner and there was less dumping.

Waiting list for replacement wheelie bins

The question from Councillor Farrell had asked how long the waiting list for replacement wheelie bins was. She stated she was not satisfied with the answer provided and stressed that the provision of wheelie bins and disposal of rubbish were very important elements towards keeping the streets clean and avoiding rat infestation. As a

supplementary question she asked what recompense residents who had experienced the waiting time, which in some cases dated back to 2007, could expect from the Council because their rubbish had not been collected.

Councillor Van Colle replied that he was sorry that some residents still did not have a bin because of the Council having to source them from Germany and the supply problem. There was a huge European demand for the bins and a shortage of plastic to make them with. He stated that the problem was recognised and that those residents affected should be getting their plastic bags of rubbish collected. If anybody was not he would like to hear about it. Councillor Van Colle added that recycled rubbish was being collected and it was very important that this was done.

Re-naming of the Borough

The question from Councillor John had asked how much it would cost to re-name the borough. Councillor John was not satisfied with the answer she had received and responded that the period of time referred to in the answer was a time when there was a Conservative Administration. Councillor John asked again as a supplementary question what the estimated cost of renaming the borough was.

Councillor Lorber replied that anybody estimating such an action would have to substantiate their claim. The actual cost could be as high or low as decided. He stated that the Chief Executive had raised the matter with his senior staff but it was not Council policy. When the time came to consider it, proper consultation would be carried out and decisions made on the amount of change needed. He pointed out that there were still signs in the borough that bore the old borough names. An argument had been presented that a re-branding of the borough would make it more attractive and therefore the costs needed to be weighed against the benefit of a potential increase in investment in the borough. If it looked like a worthwhile proposal it would be considered but at the moment the cost was zero.

Roundwood Park café

The question from Councillor Powney had asked what the policy was regarding concessionary rents to socially beneficial businesses such as Roundwood café. He asked if the answer he had received was a personal view and if not whether it reflected the position of the Conservative Group or the position of the joint administration. Councillor Powney asked as a supplementary question if a list could be provided of all the Council properties that were included in the review, the amounts of money expected to be saved and what the target date for providing such a list would be.

Councillor Blackman referred to an exercise undertaken by the previous Labour administration to review a number of organisations and the leases they held. Unfortunately, whilst it had been an excellent exercise in consultation it was never properly completed. He stated that it was now necessary to sort out those still left with unsatisfactory leases and take decisions on others. These would be included in a report to the Executive which would be open to Members to see. With particular reference to Roundwood café, Councillor Blackman replied that negotiations had broken down under the previous administration and this now needed to be sorted out so the café could continue for the benefit of the community and the Council.

Funding for advice services in Brent

The question from Councillor Thomas had asked why funding to groups like the Brent Private Tenants Rights Group had been cut. He acknowledged the lengthy reply he had received but felt it did not really answer the question. He stated that whichever political party controlled the Council, it had to manage within the resources available. He referred to the increase in central government support for local government since 1997 and that the Brent Private Tenants Rights Group could not and should not sustain any further cuts in funding. As a supplementary question he asked if it could be confirmed that no cuts to the Group would be made for the next financial year.

Councillor Allie replied that a meeting with Brent Private Tenants Rights Group was due to take place on 3rd July 2008 and that he could not pre-empt those discussion. He added that if central government provided adequate funding the Council would be able to provide all worthwhile groups with enough funding; however the Council was forced to make Gershon efficiency savings and cover the loss of housing benefit subsidy.

Southern Railways service

The question from Councillor V Brown had asked what progress had been made to stop Southern Railways from terminating its service at Clapham junction. Having recently personally used the service, Councillor Brown asked as a supplementary question what further action was going to be taken.

Councillor D Brown replied that the issue had been raised in a number of ways, including at meetings of the public transport liaison meetings. He regretted that, whilst Councillor V Brown's campaign had been partly successful in getting trains to run to Wembley Park at peak hours, it had not been agreed to extend this to a more regular service. The Council was continuing to lobby Southern Railways in the hope it would listen to its views and further improve the service.

Dollis Hill House – Heritage Lottery Funding

The question from Councillor Castle had asked for an update on the outcome of discussions with the Heritage Lottery Fund regarding Dollis Hill House. As a supplementary question, he asked what indication there was from the new Mayor of London that he would honour the commitment of the previous Mayor to fund up to half the redevelopment costs if the Council obtained the other half.

Councillor Lorber confirmed that the Council and Dollis Hill Trust were trying to arrange a meeting with the Mayor, Boris Johnson, in order to confirm that the pledge by Ken Livingstone to match up to half the cost would be supported. Councillor Lorber was pleased that the chance had been given for a scheme to materialise.

Buses using Staverton Road

The question from Councillor Shaw had asked what was being done to deal with the problems caused by buses using Staverton Road. In the absence of Councillor Shaw, Councillor Bessong asked as a supplementary question what further action would be taken.

Councillor D Brown replied that over a number of years the Council had tried to alleviate the problems suffered by residents living in Staverton Road. He added that, unfortunately it was the Mayor of London that had control over Transport for London and not the Council. The Mayor had been written to and in a meeting the Leader of the Council was to have with the Mayor the matter would also be raised. Councillor Brown felt it was time for a change for the better for the residents of Staverton Road.

Council Tax collection

The question from Councillor HB Patel had asked what the level of Council Tax collection in the current year had been and how this compared with previous years. As a supplementary question he asked where this placed Brent in relation to other Councils across London.

Councillor Blackman replied that the Council had been 30th in London but last year climbed to 27th and was now in 24th place. It had achieved the second biggest percentage increase in collection rates and if this performance was maintained against the existing performance of other London boroughs then the Council would move into the top third. Councillor Blackman added that the Council was serious about maximising Council Tax collection rates. There existed benefits for those that qualified but everyone was responsible for ensuring their Council Tax was paid.

Strathcona Centre

The question from Councillor HM Patel had asked what the future was for the Strathcona Centre. In the absence of Councillor HM Patel, Councillor Mendoza stated that from the answer received it was still not clear that the future of Strathcona was safeguarded. As a supplementary question he asked if a definitive view on what was going to happen to Strathcona could be given.

Councillor Colwill replied that he was in discussion about the future of the Strathcona Centre and he personally hoped to prevent the Centre being closed but needed to ensure others recognised its continued value.

7. Items selected by Non-Executive Members

(i) Road closures for street parties

Councillor Arnold introduced the item she had raised which called for the Council to apply limited procedures in applying for street closures for planned street parties to support 'sustainable and prosperous communities'. Councillor Arnold added that by relaxing the procedures it would meet many environmentally friendly initiatives. The Council lagged behind some other Councils which allowed street parties to go ahead without having to undertake costly bureaucratic procedures. She asked that the Executive approve the use of street notices rather than expensive newspaper notices so as to support neighbourhood policies for sustainable and prosperous communities.

Councillor Jones supported the item by referring to the community benefits street parties could bring.

Councillor D Brown (Lead Member for Transport and Highways) responded that legislation was passed in 1994 to assist with the preparation for street parties to celebrate the new millennium but that this had not been put into effect since. He stated that the Executive would endeavour to rationalise the procedures in due course.

(ii) Grass verges and tree maintenance in Northwick Park

Councillor Baker introduced the item he had raised by saying that the cutting of grass verges and tree maintenance had been a source of complaint from residents of Northwick Park ever since the contract had been awarded to the present contractors. There had been a marked deterioration in the service and he asked if the Executive would monitor the performance of the contractor more closely.

Councillor Detre, as a fellow ward councillor, supported the item and stated that the area had not received a good service from the contractor.

Councillor D Brown (Lead Member for Transport and Highways) pointed out that the item was misled in that grass cutting was carried out by the Council's Parks Service and not by a contractor. He admitted that the service had been disrupted by the bad weather. The tree maintenance contract had been with the same contractor for about 10 years during which time it was felt the Council had received a reasonable service. He urged the ward members to take up any specific problems directly with the officers responsible. Councillor Brown added that the streets of Brent were now cleaner than they had been according to recent monitoring and the methods used in other boroughs to deal with weeds were being discussed with the contractor.

(iii) New Mayor of London's Housing Policy

Councillor Thomas introduced the item he had raised by adding that the new Mayor of London was revising London's housing policy but it was not known what the new policy would be. Details so far released were limited but Councillor Thomas referred to the priorities listed on the Mayor's web site. This showed that he intended to scrap the 50% affordable housing target and change the ratio on income used to help people on to the property ladder, both of which he did not agree with.

In response some Members felt that the previous affordable housing targets had been unrealistic and were not being achieved. The new policy would provide a better balanced policy with more local discretion. It was submitted that the Council had little influence over the drafting of the Mayor's new policy and would be better off putting pressure on the Government to assist the housing market during difficult economic circumstances. It was pointed out that Councils were not allowed to build new homes and it was felt existing tenants were sometimes forced to transfer to housing associations. A view was submitted that the Government's approach to rents meant these were being driven up.

Councillor Allie (Lead Member for Housing and Customer Services) welcomed the election of the new Mayor of London and stated that the new approach to housing policy was directed to achieving mixed tenure estates, distributing wealth and helping the less well off to hold assets. Councillor Allie stated that he would be happy to have discussions with the Mayor of London on his new housing policy at some time.

RESOLVED:-

that the responses provided by the Lead Members in each case be noted and no further action on the items be taken.

8. Report from the Executive

a. Items reported by the Executive

(i) Making representations to the Post Office

The Leader reported that six Post Offices were closing and that he had visited a post office that would remain open to witness the queues forming. This was the price paid for a misguided Government policy which resulted in the closing of community assets. The Council would be lobbying the Post Office to get them to increase staff in the remaining Posts Offices to ease waiting times.

(ii) Success with cleaner streets

The Leader was pleased to report on the success in improving the cleanliness of the borough's streets but added that more needed to be done.

(iii) The roll out of compulsory recycling

The Leader pointed out that compulsory recycling would be introduced within the borough in early August and urged all Members to encourage their constituents to participate and thereby reduce the level of landfill tax paid by the Council.

(iv) Refurbishment of Harlesden Library

Work was soon to start on the refurbishment of Harlesden Library.

(v) Increase in participation at Kingsbury Library

The Leader commended Members to visit the new Kingsbury Library where the number of visitors and books issued had already exceeded estimates.

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(vi) Redevelopment of Kilburn Library garden

The good work in redeveloping the Kilburn Library garden was reported.

(vii) The roll out of ward CCTV

The Leader thanked those ward councillors who had supported the use of mobile CCTV.

(vii) Recognition from London Cycle network

The Leader congratulated officers from the Council's Transportation Unit for their successful bid to the London Cycle Network.

(viii) START

No further information given.

(x) Learning disabilities week

The Leader referred to the presentation given by Brent Mencap prior to the meeting of Council. This had covered information on work related projects and had set the Council clear targets which he stated would be addressed. He thanked Mencap for their work and presentation.

(xi) Reallocation of funding for projects for young people

The Leader stated that there had been a review of grant funding which had released funds for projects specifically aimed at young people. He invited Members to raise any ideas for such funding.

(xii) Toilets in Queens Park

The Leader referred to the route of the Notting Hill carnival and that it was clear that there was inadequate toilet provision in the Queens Park area. He was pleased to report that additional toilets would be provided this year.

(xiii) Greater liaison and scrutiny with housing partners

No further information given.

b. Decisions taken by the Executive under the Council's urgency provisions

RESOLVED:

that the decisions taken by the Executive under the Council's urgency provisions relating to the following items be noted:

- Clarendon Gardens 10 mph zone and gated closure
- Petition – Preston Road/East Lane junction
- Brent House Lease
- Housing management arrangements for South Kilburn temporary accommodation scheme
- Brent House, High Road – acquisition of freehold

9. **Report from the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny**

Councillor Jones presented her report on the work of Overview and Scrutiny over the past few months. She stated that Members continued to look at the range of services provided by the Council, progress the work being undertaken by the task groups and track the decisions they were taking. She reported that the work of the task group considering Post Office closures was more detailed than most and she was disappointed that its findings had been ignored by the Post Office. The Performance and Finance Select Committee would continue the important role of monitoring the major contracts and the experience gained by the Budget Panel was to be welcomed. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee continued to have a very full work programme and benefitted from the regular attendance by the Lead Member for Children and Families. The Health Select Committee had many issues to consider.

RESOLVED:-

that the report of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

10. **Motions selected by Group Leaders**

(a) *Streetcare*

The motion in the name of the Leader of the Labour Group asked the Council to deplore the failure of the Administration with regard to Streetcare. She stated that she did not believe the Council was being best served by the Contractor, Viola. On behalf of the Leader of the Group, Councillor Powney moved the motion by citing the different areas of the contract that were not being carried out satisfactorily. He referred to tree works not being effective, the condition of pavements particularly the growth of weeds and the imposition of a £25 charge for collecting bulk waste which had led to more fly tipping.

In response the Leader of the Council, Councillor Lorber, referred to publicity that had been issued by Brent MPs which suggested certain types of rubbish had previously been collected for free when this was not the case. He expressed the view that the suppliers of many goods should have the responsibility for ensuring there were proper methods of disposal available. He also stated that by continuing to criticise the charge made for the collection of bulky rubbish it encouraged dumping and this would not be tolerated.

In support of the motion it was claimed that the suggestion that the streets were cleaner than before was not true. It was held that the contractor was not doing the job required and there did not appear to be the motivation within the Council to improve things. Further

examples of the poor street scene were raised including blocked drains, missing gratings to gullies, weeds in gullies, dirty and broken pavements and overgrown trees blocking the street lights. It was submitted that the overall street scene needed to be improved.

Reference was made to the misuse in some areas of herbicides used to control weeds growing on pavements which had scorched the grass verges.

Opposing the motion it was stated that all the streets that needed cleaning were being done and a lot of the problems were caused by developers of adjacent land. The view was put that such developers should be held more accountable for the mess and damage they caused. Tackling graffiti was another major problem where the perpetrators needed to be punished with the same being the case for those that dropped litter. It was pointed out that the street lighting contract was one inherited from the previous Administration and was a good contract. The £25 charge was claimed to be an appropriate charge to make and it was wrong to criticise it. The transfer of responsibilities from street wardens to Police Community Safety Officers had improved the service to residents. The Council was spending more on maintaining the borough's streets than before and it showed. It was everyone's responsibility not to throw their rubbish on the street.

Councillor D Brown sought to introduce an amendment to the motion but, on objection by Councillor J Moher under standing order 46,¹ this was ruled by the Mayor to negate the original motion and so was not put to the vote.

The motion in the name of the Leader of the Labour Group was put to the vote and declared LOST.

(b) Maintaining a cohesive Brent

Councillor Sneddon moved the motion on behalf of the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group which expressed concern over the setting of the new 42 day limit for detaining residents without charge and sought to pass on the Council's concern about the implications of this and the potential impact in respect of community cohesion and citizen empowerment. Councillor Sneddon added that this had profound implications for the borough where people had worked hard to build trust between communities and with the police and these efforts were threatened by this measure. He stated that terrorists could not threaten democracy anymore than this measure could defeat terrorism. He felt that the other Brent MPs should follow MP Sarah Teather's example and oppose this measure in the interests of maintaining all the good work done on promoting community cohesion within the borough.

¹ This text was amended at the meeting of Full Council on 8th September 2008

In response to the motion it was felt to be unfortunate that a motion had been chosen on a topic that was nothing to do with any services

provided by the Council but only served as an opportunity to criticise the Government. It was only government that could determine these matters. Of local concern was that Council services were underperforming and that to maintain community cohesion the Council needed to be able to deliver services fairly on an equitable basis. The motioned called for the Leader of the Council to write to the Prime Minister but it was doubted that this would make much difference. Another view expressed was that in supporting the work of the police it was noted that the Metropolitan Police Commissioner had said that he did not see a case for extending the time limit to 42 days. The Government had been forced to strike political deals to get the measure through parliament and whilst recognising the difficult issues facing the security services this was not a measure that would help.

The motion in the name of the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group was put to the vote and declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED:

That Council notes with sadness and disappointment the vote in Parliament on 11th June 2008 setting a new 42 day limit for detaining residents without charge.

That Council further notes that while 36 Labour members of parliament voted with Brent East Liberal Democrat MP, Sarah Teather against the Government, in line with their principles, these sadly did not include either Labour MP elected to represent the interests of Brent residents.

In re-emphasising the importance to this Council of community cohesion, the Council's Diversity Team be congratulated on developing an approach to preventing extremism that highlights how the Council will work with its diverse communities and is based on a clear strategy for success, and a sound knowledge of the aspirations and concerns of our communities.

Council notes that this Administration's positive approach is in stark contrast to the counterproductive action taken by the Labour Government in further reducing basic freedoms, which is likely to heighten fears among Brent's communities about discrimination and possible targeting.

Council therefore asks the Leader to write to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and Brent's Labour MPs expressing this Council's concern about the implications of the 42 day limit and its potential impact in the Borough in respect to community cohesion and citizens' empowerment.

(c) *Combating gun and knife crime*

The motion in the name of the Leader of the Conservative Group called for a review of the admission arrangements at licensed premises to consider more measures to prevent people carrying knives from being admitted. Councillor Blackman stated that this issue affected all the residents of the borough with recent statistics suggesting 1 in 4 young people carried a knife for self defence. People needed to be educated to recognise that carrying a weapon was wrong and more severe mandatory sentencing for carrying guns and knives was needed otherwise the menace would continue to grow. The Council needed to look at what action it could take as well as the Government and the Mayor of London.

All sides expressed concern over the dangers posed by people carrying weapons. It was submitted that there was a danger in creating a climate of fear and there needed to be a consistency of approach between the government, sentencing and the actions of the police. More intelligence was needed in order to tackle the underlying causes but extending the powers of stop and search would run the danger of alienating the community. It was not only young people that committed this crime and it was important not to demonise all young people for the actions of a few. Concern was expressed that the motion called for enhanced powers but contained nothing the Council might do. It was submitted that there needed to be political leadership in delivering a message to schools, parents and others as to the dangers in carrying weapons.

Councillor Matthews moved an amendment to the motion seeking to remove specific reference to young people and enhanced stop and search powers and including more intelligence led community policing. This was put to the vote and declared CARRIED.

The motion in the name of the Leader of the Conservative Group, as amended, was put to the vote and declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED:

This Council expresses its deep concern at the high number of reported cases of knife and gun crime. This Council expresses further concern that reports suggest that 1 in 4 young people carry knives on the basis of providing self defence.

This Council notes that many incidents of knives being used in fights take place in or near to licensed premises.

This Council believes that preventing the carrying of knives and guns is the only certain way of preventing their use and the only way of halting the tragic unnecessary loss of life. This Council supports all measures

taken to halt the spread of carrying guns and knives including educating young people on the tragic results of using knives in fights. However, this Council believes that the carrying of knives as concealed weapons can only be eliminated by clear and unambiguous punishments for so doing.

This Council therefore believes that there should be clear, mandatory prison sentences for all those caught carrying knives, that there should be a mandatory prison sentence for anyone who uses a knife to endanger another human being and that these sentences should be rigorously enforced. People will then be clear that society judges it wrong to carry knives and that they will be severely punished if they choose to do so.

In addition, this Council calls for more intelligence led community policing to help foster better relations between the police and community, thus improving the chances of receiving information to enable the protection of other young people, and a reduction in the bureaucratic workload of form filling to allow police more time to help remove the growing menace of knives in our society.

This Council calls for a review of the admission arrangements at licensed premises to consider more measures to prevent people carrying knives from being admitted.

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm

R FOX
Mayor