

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, 27th October 2008** at **7.15 pm**

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor Fox

The Deputy Mayor
Councillor O'Sullivan

COUNCILLORS:

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

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bacchus, Baker, Beswick, Crane, Eniola, Farrell, Leaman, Malik, Ms Shaw, Singh, Steel and Thomas.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 8th September 2008 be confirmed as a true and accurate record.

3. **Declarations of Interests**

At this meeting there were none.

4. **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor was pleased to report that Councillor Steel's condition had improved and it was hoped that he would be able to leave hospital shortly. Both Councillor Steel and his wife wanted to thank everyone for their good wishes and get well cards.

The Mayor reported that Councillor Corcoran had taken part in an endurance event on 11th October to raise money for St Luke's Hospice. He ran, swam, walked and cycled for over 20 hours.

The Mayor reported that 25 people including councillors and staff had enjoyed a sponsored charity walk from Brent Town Hall to Alexandra Palace on Sunday 19th October in aid of the Mayor's charities and the Paul Daisley Trust. He thanked Richard Cotton for organising the event.

The Mayor drew attention to the Borough's Remembrance Day Services taking place on Sunday 9th November at St John The Evangelist Church and at Barham Park. He encouraged everyone to attend this occasion in memory of all of those who had lost their lives during various conflicts.

Finally, the Mayor drew attention to the petition schedule circulated which showed progress of petitions received.

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

RESOLVED:-

that Councillor Hirani replace Councillor Green as 1st alternate to Councillor Cummins and Councillor Motley replace Councillor Hirani as 2nd alternate to Councillor Green on the Planning Committee.

6. Question time

The selected questions submitted under the provisions of standing order 38 had been circulated together with written responses from the respective Lead Members. The Members who had put the questions were invited to ask their supplementary questions.

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

Provision of advice services

The question from Councillor Arnold had asked what action the Council was taking to increase the provision of advice services to assist residents facing debt management problems. Councillor Arnold added that given that the SLA review of the service was not due until 2009/10, she asked as a supplementary question how the council was assessing need and increased demand in the present economic downturn when more landlords might default on their maintenance and other responsibilities and tenants in the private sector become more vulnerable to poor housing, rising rents and debt. Councillor Arnold also asked that as debt was one of the biggest factors causing poverty and homelessness, what was the council policy on making debt management advice and information about it widely available, bearing in mind it had closed the One Stop Shop in Kilburn where there were many private tenants.

Councillor Allie replied that the council was aware of the potential challenges arising from the credit crunch and that the Executive was working with officers to identify targets to be monitored to ensure the council was live to changes and had necessary procedures in place. Regarding support services, the council would continue to support advice agencies and ensure they were not disproportionately affected. He assured that there would be adequate advice provision in the borough.

Monitoring of investment portfolio

The question from Councillor Van Kalwala had asked what action the council was taking to monitor its investment portfolio with particular reference to monies in overseas financial institutions. As a supplementary question, Councillor Van Kawala asked what Collateral Service Agreement did the Council have in place in regards to its current trade portfolio.

Councillor Blackman replied that the Council like many others deposited funds with a wide range of institutions, and continues to take advice to ensure investments are safeguarded. Approximately £129m is invested in a variety of institutions in the UK with household names,

however, investments on fixed term deposits were not yet due to be returned. Once due, Councillor Blackman assured the Council that it would be insisting on a full return.

Effect of credit crunch on plans for a new civic centre

The question from Councillor Butt had asked how the credit crunch had affected plans for a new civic centre. Councillor Butt, while supporting the idea of a civic centre in principle, felt that responsibility for delivery should rest with the Chief Executive and senior officers currently responsible for the project instead of the single post proposed of Assistant Director for the Civic Centre, and sought assurances that it would be delivered on time.

Councillor Lorber replied that there were many factors involved in the delivery of the new civic centre however he stressed the need for the centre to be on time, within budget and also the most efficient premises within the resources available. He was pleased that the project was already off to a good start, having bought a site at a reasonable price.

Fly tipping

The question from Councillor Powney asked for a breakdown by ward of reported fly tips between April 2007 and September 2008. He queried the reply he had received by asking how an average of 728 reported fly tips per month for 3 months compared with 1,543 in the 3 month period leading up to the start of the new contract could be considered an improvement. Noting that there was a significant concentration of fly tipping in certain wards, roughly coinciding with the Brent South constituency but also including Dudden Hill and Willesden, Councillor Powney asked as a supplementary question why this was and what plans were there to do something about it.

Councillor D Brown stated that he would prefer to hear people condemning those that dumped rubbish rather than questioning the rate of fly tipping. In reply he maintained that a 50% reduction in fly tipping was to be welcomed. He felt it had always been the case that some wards had a greater level of fly tipping and suggested one reason might be the type of tenure in an area where landlords might not take their responsibilities as seriously as they should to dispose of household rubbish properly.

Naming of building on old Grunwick site

The question from Councillor Long had asked if the Council would support the naming of a building on the old Grunwick site after the leader of the Grunwick workers, Mrs Jayaben Desai. Councillor Long questioned how sincere the Lead Member was in wanting to name the building after one of the borough's most famous residents who was

also a woman from an ethnic minority in the most culturally diverse borough. She felt the initiative should be taken to ensure this was done. As a supplementary question she asked who would be making the proposal to the developers that a building be named after Mrs Desai; would it be the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, or a more junior officer and what other suggestions would be made.

Councillor Van Colle expressed surprise over being asked such a question because he recalled that under the previous Administration suggestions for two ex-councillors of longstanding to have buildings named after them had been put forward and refused. In reply he restated that it was not for the council to suggest names. Grunwick was a famous name in Brent and represented a piece of history and he was happy if either the Grunwick name or that of Mrs Desai was used.

The following three questions had been selected by the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group.

Western extension to the congestion charging zone

The question from Councillor Green had asked if the Lead Member supported the call for the Kensal Triangle to be included in the residents' discount zone should the western extension to the congestion charging zone proceed. He was pleased to receive the answer he had from the Lead Member indicating that he fully supported this and asked as a supplementary question if he would undertake to keep monitoring the situation as time was of the essence.

Councillor D Brown assured Councillor Green that he would.

Rollout of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)

The question from Councillor Corcoran had asked for an update on the rollout of Council funded PCSOs and other actions being taken to make Brent a safer place. He welcomed the answer he had received and referred to the well attended Not Another Drop march. He noted the 57% drop in gun crime and the 15% drop in knife crime. Councillor Corcoran referred to the operation of the Controlled Drinking Zone which he felt had been a success in Tokyngton Ward and was vital on Wembley event days. He was pleased to see that many schemes were underway to make Brent a safer borough, many in partnership between the Council and other agencies.

Councillor Matthews replied that she hoped Councillor Corcoran and his fellow councillors would continue with their support.

Compulsory recycling

The question from Councillor Cummins had asked what progress had been made on recycling following the recent introduction of compulsory recycling, more specifically what the take up by residents had been, how much was now being recycled and had the lead given by the Council worked. As a supplementary question, Councillor Cummins asked what plans were there to further drive recycling and cut the amount going to landfill over the next 18 months.

Councillor Van Colle replied by informing the Council that he was now Chair of the West London Waste Authority and that waste was a massive problem for the various authorities to deal with. He aimed to lead the West London Waste Authority into being a recycling rather than a disposal authority. London Councils had submitted a policy on waste to the Mayor of London which included a zero landfill approach. He was thankful to those residents contributing to the recycling effort but warned that there was still a long way to go.

The following two questions had been selected by the Leader of the Conservative Group.

Neighbourhood working

The question from Councillor Joseph had asked if residents could be involved in the decision making process for how money was spent within the neighbourhood working programme. She added that the recent White Paper *Communities in Control* stated that citizens should have a greater say in how Council money was spent. Councillor Joseph asked as a supplementary question if it was not considered more democratic to have local residents involved in neighbourhood working as this would prevent councillors supporting their own pet projects and bring further accountability to the process.

Councillor Sneddon replied that the White Paper was not specific on this issue and he did not feel that participatory budgeting would suit neighbourhood working because of the level of administration that would be required for relatively small sums of money. He hoped that ward members would be able to reach agreement on the best projects for their area but in the event of them not being able to the Neighbourhood Working Members Reference Group would have to arbitrate.

Houses in multiple occupation

The question from Councillor Kansagra had asked what the Council was doing about the serious problems caused by overcrowding and multi-occupancy houses and how this would be dealt with for neighbours and council taxpayers alike. He added that there were

increasing numbers of cases where garages and sheds were being converted into living accommodation which created substandard housing and breaches of planning control. As a supplementary question, Councillor Kansagra asked if a solution could be found involving all the relevant areas of the Council, such as housing, planning and the anti-social behaviour team, working together to tackle the issue and to seek additional funding for police to enforce solutions to this growing problem.

Councillor Van Colle replied that if planning control was breached then the Council had a very good planning enforcement team that would take action against the owner of the property. If evidence emerged that this was indeed a growing problem then Councillor Van Colle acknowledged that it would have to be addressed and if need be he would be willing to make a growth bid for additional resources. Councillor Van Colle recognised that substandard accommodation led to sub standard tenant behaviour. He undertook to ask the Anti-Social Behaviour Team to have a look at this aspect of anti social behaviour.

7. Items selected by Non-Executive Members

(i) Gang culture

Councillor John introduced the item she had raised which asked for the Executive to re-visit existing relevant policies in the light of recent evidence that young children were being pressured to join gangs by the older members of the gangs. She stated that Brent was just behind Hackney and Lambeth on the map of London indicating the number of known gangs operating in an area. She referred to a case known to her involving a particular eight year old who was now distressed as a result of his involvement with a gang. The Council had provided some support to the family but she felt more was needed in cases such as this. Councillor John referred to a leaflet produced by the Home Office which she hoped could be used to put into schools. However she asked that a wider response to this issue be formulated.

Reporting back from the Harlesden Area Consultative Forum it was said that young people referred to territorial warfare. It was felt that one cause was the closure over the years of youth centres and playgrounds where previously young people had interacted with each other. A view was submitted that the previous Administration's record on this was poor and the consequences were now being felt. Another point made was that the issue of female gangs also needed addressing. The point was made that the Council needed to ensure all children were safe. Reference was made to Brent's Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board which concentrated on ensuring child safety but a view was put that stronger action was needed. A point was made that there was not one issue to tackle but many. Young people needed safe places to go and things to do. Whilst

Not Another Drop was doing good work it was supported by only one member of staff. It was suggested that residents wanted to see better relations with the police so that young people could be stopped from getting involved in gangs. Finally it was said that more local mentors were needed.

Councillor Matthews (Lead Member for Crime Prevention and Public Safety) responded by saying that she was sure she spoke for all on the Council when she said how important this item was. It was something the Executive took very seriously and a piece of research had been commissioned to look into what the position actually was on the ground. It was not correct to say that there was only one person supporting the Not Another Drop campaign for whilst there was only one dedicated Council officer, that person worked with other partnership agencies. She submitted that it was not just about opening new facilities because the issues were broader than this. Young people needed opportunities including good schooling and jobs. She agreed that there was always more that could be done but the borough had seen a 50% drop in gun crime and this was a good start.

(ii) Protecting our local environment

Councillor Hashmi introduced the item he had raised which concerned the waste dump being planned in Barnet at Cricklewood Broadway. Given the experience in Brent with the Neasden Goods yard, local residents were very concerned about the threat to their environment. Councillor Hashmi asked that everything possible was done to protect local residents from the environmental dangers posed by such a development.

Concern was expressed that consultation by the West London Waste Planning Group on the West London Waste Plan had not yet been posted on the Council's web site despite the public meeting at Brent Town Hall being on 29th October 2008. It was asked if this site was included in the plan and whether the Council's views were going to be made known.

Councillor Van Colle (Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture) acknowledged reference to the consultation. He explained that the site was not included in the plan because it fell within the North London area. The proposal was for a waste handling facility as part of the overall Brent Cross/Cricklewood development proposals. This involved the major expansion of Brent Cross shopping centre to create a new town centre as well as other uses such as a cinema, offices, community facilities and housing. The council would have the opportunity to formally comment on this planning proposal. The proposal was for the waste facility to be located between the Edgware Road and Midland mainline railway and would replace an existing open waste management site. A main concern for Brent was the likely

vehicle generation of the facility and a Transport Assessment to accompany the planning application was still awaited. Councillor Van Colle confirmed that some Brent waste was sent to the current facility. He explained that the Council had no control over what was proposed for the area. The proposal for a combined heat and power facility was an important aspect of the proposed development because such facilities were likely to be very important to the country as a whole. There would be massive investment in such a modern facility and the Council had to have the opportunity to comment on the proposals but they would not come to fruition for several years.

(iii) Safeguarding regeneration

Councillor Jackson introduced the item he had raised which expressed concern over the threat to the regeneration of the South Kilburn area caused by the economic crisis. He asked that the Executive review the outstanding programme and push the Government to ensure its delivery. Councillor Jackson added that he realised complex negotiations were going on but was concerned over the threat to an area which needed regenerating. He reminded the meeting that the original proposals had envisaged the creation of streets rather than tower blocks partly funded by selling homes to private buyers. If the masterplan for the area was achieved it would be an excellent result but the economic climate made it much harder to achieve.

The meeting was reminded that South Kilburn was not the only area the Council wanted to regenerate but it was stated that the Government had changed its mind over some of the undertakings it had given for the South Kilburn area. It was to have been a comprehensive regeneration with funding of £150M available but this had been reduced to £50M being available just for the housing component. Nevertheless the Council was determined to keep pressing for a comprehensive scheme that would create not only improved housing but a community benefit. A view was put that addressing the issues now was too late when the programme had been outstanding for the last 2½ years and now faced the implications of the credit crunch. Greater action was needed to make good the promises given to local residents. The Brent in2work service had recently achieved its 240th job placement in the area but there had been a failure to deliver other benefits.

Councillor Detre (Lead Member for Regeneration and Economic Development) responded by saying that proposals for the area involved various housing types and financial packages. It was not just a case of making representations to Government for the funding but developers were reluctant to proceed in the current economic climate. This presented the opportunity to review the scheme to ensure it met the needs of the area. Councillor Detre stated that he was meeting

regularly with officers to ensure a scheme proceeded as quickly as possible.

RESOLVED:-

that the responses provided by the Lead Members on the above items indicating that the Executive accepted the importance of each item and would continue to give consideration to them be noted and accepted.

8. **Report from the Executive**

a. Items reported by the Executive

(i) Improvement and Efficiency Strategy

Councillor Lorber reported on the launch of the Improvement and Efficiency Strategy. He stated that with inflation currently running at 5.2% and much less than that allowed for within the local government financial settlement, it meant that becoming more efficient was key to the Council successfully delivering improved services.

(ii) Local Democracy Week

Councillor Lorber thanked all those councillors and officers who had taken part in events that took place during local democracy week. He particularly mentioned the elections that had been organised for the Youth Parliament and the visits some councillors had made to schools.

(iii) Equality Standard Level Three

Councillor Lorber was pleased to report that the Council had achieved a high level 3 under the Equality Standard for Local Government and he congratulated the staff involved for this achievement.

(iv) New recycling bins

Councillor Lorber informed Council that over 50 paper recycling bins had been placed within the borough with a further 45 bins for cans and plastic bottles to be rolled out. He stated that this would make a real contribution towards recycling and was proud of the Council's achievements in this area.

(v) Green zones

Councillor Van-Colle reported on the availability of a Government grant of £15,000 to support people in achieving 100% recycling of their waste. The borough was fortunate to have a number of people willing to do this for which he thanked them. It was hoped that they in turn

would be able to convince others in their area to apply to be a Green Zone.

(vi) Successful opening of Wembley Academy

Councillor Lorber reported that 60 pupils had started school at the temporary buildings on the Wembley Academy site. Progress was being made with the plans to build a new school on the site which was part of a £250M programme of expansion of school places across the borough to give parents greater choices about where their children were educated.

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 item be noted:

- Exercise of delegated powers – urgency action by the Chief Executive. Extension of lease of Lothian Close from MHT

9. Report from the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny

Councillor Jones presented her report on the work of Overview and Scrutiny. She reported that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had focussed attention on services for adult health and social care. The outcome of the Commission for Social Care Inspection on Independence, Well-being and Choice had shown that Brent was generally doing well in this area. Councillor Jones had asked that a briefing on awareness of signs of abuse in constituents be organised for councillors. She was pleased that the Council had recognised the flaws in the consultation carried out on modernising learning disabilities day services and was consulting again on this.

Councillor Jones pointed out that the next meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee would receive the final report of the task group on involving parents and faith groups in talking to young people about sex and relationships.

The Forward Plan Select Committee was working hard to ensure that consultation carried out by the Council was meaningful and thorough. The Health Select Committee had met since preparation of her report and Councillor Jones pointed out the disappointing results of the 2007/08 National Patient Satisfaction survey on GP access and assured the Council that the select committee would continue to monitor this situation.

Councillor Jones stated that it was appreciated when Lead Members were able to attend meetings when asked to and that it would help if

any Lead Member not able to attend a meeting passed on their apologies and made efforts to find an alternative to attend in their place.

Finally, Councillor Jones referred to a training event for the overview and scrutiny chairs that had been arranged for 12th November.

RESOLVED:-

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

10. **Procedural motion**

Councillor Bessong moved a procedural motion which was put to the vote and declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED:-

That Standing Order 45 be suspended in so far as to allow the motion submitted by the Leader of the Conservative group under item 9 on the agenda to be heard immediately following the submission of the motion by the Leader of the Labour group after which a debate for up to 35 minutes will be allowed on both motions before moving to vote on each of the motions.

11. **Motions selected by Group Leaders**

(a) & (b) *Icelandic bank crisis*

The motion in the name of the Leader of the Labour Group expressed regret that the Liberal Democrat Group on the Council had not taken the advice of its national leadership and disinvested from Icelandic banks. She hoped that a measure of agreement could be reached on this matter and referred to the chronology of warnings which began in August 2006 and culminated in Michael Fallon (Conservative MP for Sevenoaks) and Vince Cable (Liberal Democrat shadow chancellor and MP for Twickenham) stating that previous warnings they had given had gone unheeded. Councillor John referred to discussion at the Budget Panel which heard that the Council's financial advisors had visited Iceland in August only to return satisfied with what they had heard. She felt everyone on the Council needed to take the issue of how the Council invested its money more seriously and called for a full report on the Council's investments, outside of pension investment, to the Audit Committee.

The motion in the name of the Leader of the Conservative Group sought to recognise that the Council had acted prudently with regard to its investments with two Icelandic banks and to condemn the Icelandic

government in declaring that it would refuse to honour the debts. The motion called on all the necessary legal steps to be taken to secure the return of funds owed to the Council. Councillor Blackman felt that the motion in the name of the Leader of the Labour Group was not worded in a way that could attract cross party support. He hoped his motion would be agreed by the Council instead. He explained how it was that the Council had so much money to invest and the importance of investing it responsibly by reference to the £11M earned by way of interest over the last two years. This followed guidance previously issued by the then Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, MP on getting the best return possible on money invested. On 30th September the Icelandic banks involved still had the highest possible

credit ratings. The £15M the Council had deposited with these two banks was due to be returned at the end of the year and the Council expected the monies to be returned with full interest.

In debate it was pointed out that the grave economic circumstances were not only bad for bankers but also for families in the borough. It was pointed out that Brent was by no means the only authority to have money invested with Icelandic banks. It was felt by some members that the situation should not be turned into a political knock about. However criticism was levelled by some members that appropriate action had not been taken to reduce the Council's exposure to the risk involved. It was claimed that the Council had not followed Treasury advice to ensure the financial institutions it dealt with retained a high credit rating. The accusation was made that there had been financial mismanagement by the Council at a time when it could ill-afford any loss. It was mentioned that an additional £20M was still not safely accounted for. The call for a report to be submitted to the Audit Committee was supported by some members. Reference was made to the prevailing economic climate in the UK and the view was expressed that the Government had encouraged bankers to make London the financial centre of the world, embracing a risk based regulatory approach. One of the Council's deposits in Iceland had previously been held by a long established Scottish bank that the Government had allowed to be taken over. Although the credit rating for the two banks involved had only dropped in September it was stated that there had been earlier warnings. The question was asked as to whose responsibility it was to keep a month by month check on the Council's investment accounts, the officers and/or the appropriate lead member.

Councillor Dunn moved an amendment to the motion which sought to recognise that this was a wide scale issue that was more concerned with the Government's handling of the economy than the actions of many councils. He asked why the Government had not issued clear advice to local authorities to withdraw any monies deposited with Icelandic banks. The Council's treasury advisors had been invited to

the next meeting of the Performance and Finance Select Committee to explain what had happened and all members were welcome to attend.

The amendment to the motion was put to the vote and declared CARRIED. The motion submitted by the Leader of the Labour Group, as amended, was put to the vote and declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED:-

This Council notes reports that Brighton & Hove City Council disinvested from Icelandic banks a year ago following the advice of the Financial Times and other leading experts. Amongst those advising councils to disinvest was the Liberal Democrats Treasury Spokesperson, Vince Cable, MP.

The Council regrets that Brent Council, like 120 other councils, followed the Labour government's advice recommending placing of deposits with banks such as those in Iceland despite concerns expressed by the Liberal Democrat national leadership on this issue, we note however that those concerns led to reassurances from the Labour Government that there was no concern about the liquidity or capital base of Icelandic banks operating in the UK.

The Council notes that the Government and the Local Government Association (LGA) agree that there is no evidence of recklessness by local authorities; and further notes that Councils and other organisations across the country, of all political colours are affected by this matter – including the Audit Commission, the Government's body which regulates the proper control of public finances by local authorities and the National Health Service in England and Wales, and Labour-run Haringey which has deposits of £37 million.

The Council notes that when speaking to city bankers at Mansion House in 2007, the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown said that to maintain our competitiveness we should enhance a "risk based regulatory approach, as we did in resisting pressure for a British Sarbannes-Oxley after Enron and Worldcom" while praising "the beginning of a new golden age for the City of London".

Furthermore this Council notes with concern the reports that Chancellor Alastair Darling MP suspected Icelandic assurances concerning the severity of the Icelandic situation and yet did not instruct his Treasury to change its advice to Local Authorities. This Council supports Vince Cable MP's call for the Chancellor to explain himself to parliament.

The Council resolves to:

- (i) Call on the government to acknowledge its role in this crisis and to guarantee all affected deposits made by Councils following advice from the Government's Audit Commission, to ensure that Brent Council Tax payers are not affected in any way.
- (ii) Support the LGA's call for a Government Inquiry into how credit ratings agencies continued to give Icelandic banks high credit ratings right up until a matter of days before they went into administration or receivership.
- (iii) Express concern that Gordon Brown's Labour Government, while promising to rid this country of boom and bust economics, has, by bad regulation, encouraged it.

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

RESOLVED:-

This Council notes that Brent has £15m on deposit with two Icelandic banks, Glitnir and Heritable Bank and further notes that a number of Icelandic banks have recently fallen foul of the credit crunch and been taken into administration by the Icelandic government.

This Council believes that we have acted prudently in this matter, have followed the correct procedures and have fully acted in accordance with Treasury guidance which states that councils should 'seek the highest rate of return consistent with the proper levels of security and liquidity'.

This Council condemns the conduct of the Icelandic Government in declaring that they will refuse to honour the debts of their own financial institutions and resolves to take all necessary legal steps in cooperation with the LGA, London Councils and any other interested bodies to secure the safe return of funds owed to this Authority. This Council also calls on the British Government to take all the requisite legal steps to secure the safe return of these funds.

(c) *Mobility benefits for blind residents*

The motion in the name of the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group called on the Council to make representations to Government and Brent MPs concerning their entitlement to the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance. Councillor Green moved the motion on behalf of the Leader and made reference to his personal experience upon his grandfather becoming blind. He felt that the current position with regard to blind people not being able to access the

higher rate mobility benefit resulted from an oversight by successive governments and hoped the Council would support the motion.

Councillor Long moved an amendment to the motion which sought to reflect the poor provision the borough made for blind people and resolving to introduce a number of initiatives to improve this. She added that she was disappointed that none of Brent's MPs had so far signed the early day motion on this issue. Whilst recognising the issue regarding Disability Living Allowance, Councillor Long felt that the Council should be doing a lot more to support those with a sight impairment.

The criteria for Disability Living Allowance was explained and it was submitted that the split between the lower and higher rate discriminated against older people. In order to qualify for the higher rate it was explained that the claimant needed to be able to demonstrate that they were unable to walk but this criteria overlooked the mobility needs of blind people. It was felt that eligibility of blind people could be easily defined and there was hope that the Government would make the necessary changes to the regulations but this was not yet certain.

The amendment to the motion moved by Councillor Long was put to the vote and declared LOST.

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

RESOLVED:

This Council notes:

1. that blind people experience significant barriers to independent mobility
2. that blind people are often isolated and can find it difficult to access basic services without mobility assistance
3. that many blind residents in Brent find it difficult to access shops, supermarkets, doctors, dentists and community facilities and centres
4. that blind residents find it difficult to access many services without mobility support, and face additional costs as a result.

This Council further notes:

1. that blind people are not entitled to the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance

2. that loss of usable sight clearly causes significant independent mobility problems and incurs significant additional and unmet costs
3. that due to a lack of Government funding, some blind people are excluded from social care support because their needs are not considered “critical” or “substantial”.

This Council thereby resolves:

1. to ask the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Rt. Hon James Purnell MP, expressing these concerns;
2. to ask the Leader of the Council to write to Brent’s three MPs asking that they sign up to EDM number 1982 and that they write to the Secretary of State expressing these concerns;
3. to support the Royal National Institute of Blind People’s (RNIB) campaign on securing the higher rate mobility component of DLA for blind people.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm

R FOX
Mayor