

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, 24th November 2008** at **7.15 pm**

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor Fox

The Deputy Mayor
Councillor O'Sullivan

COUNCILLORS:

Ahmed	John
Allie	Jones
Anwar	Joseph
Arnold	Leaman
Mrs Bacchus	Long
Bessong	Lorber
Beswick	Malik
Blackman	Matthews
D Brown	Mendoza
V Brown	Mistry
Butt	J Moher
Chavda	R Moher
Clues	Moloney
Colwill	Motley
Corcoran	CJ Patel
Crane	H B Patel
Cummins	H M Patel
Detre	Powney
Dunn	Ms Shaw
Eniola	Sneddon
Farrell	Tancred
Mrs Fernandes	Thomas
Gupta	Van Colle
Hashmi	Van Kalwala
Hirani	Wharton
Jackson	

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Baker, Castle, Coughlin, Dunwell, Green, Kansagra, Pagnamenta, Singh and Steel.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council held on 27th October 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 announce that the Revenue and Benefits Unit had received an award as the "Most improved benefit service in the country", by The Institute of Revenue and Rating.

The Mayor reminded Members of his Charity Christmas Party taking place on Saturday 13th December in the Paul Daisley Hall.

The Mayor drew Members attention to the petition schedule circulated at the meeting.

The Mayor welcomed students from the Convent of Jesus and Mary Language College and members of the Youth Parliament.

5. **Procedural motion**

Councillor Bessong moved a procedural motion circulated in his name seeking agreement on how the 1st Reading Debate should be conducted, which was put to the vote and declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED:

that in respect of Summons item 11, 1st Reading Debate – 2009/10 to 2012/13 Budget the time allowed for the 1st reading debate be extended to up to 60 minutes, leaving it to the Mayor to exercise his discretion to extend the time further if he considers it necessary, with the three Group Leaders being given up to ten minutes each to speak on the item, and other members speaking for up to 3 minutes each in accordance with the normal rules of debate.

6. **Councillor Steel – absence from meetings**

RESOLVED:

that, should Councillor Steel not attend a meeting before 28th January 2009, his absence from meetings of the Council for a period in excess of 6 months be approved due to him being hospitalised and recuperating from an accident.

7. **Changes to the Constitution**

The Council received a report proposing a series of minor changes to the Council's Constitution arising out of the regular 6 monthly review of the Constitution. A supplementary report had been separately circulated because a recent change in regulations made one of the changes recommended in the earlier report unnecessary.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that standing order 38 relating to Question Time be amended as set out in appendix 1 to the report;
- (ii) that a procedure for a special meeting be re-introduced as set out in appendix 2 to the report;
- (iii) that the Constitution be amended so that electronic versions of documents must be provided instead of paper copies, as set out in appendix 3 of the report;
- (iv) that the functions relating to elections and community governance reviews be delegated to the General Purposes Committee and/or the Chief Executive as set out in the updated appendix attached to the supplementary report.

8. **Question time**

Local Democracy Week

As part of Local Democracy Week which took place 13th to 17th October, young people had been offered the opportunity to put forward questions under this item at the Council meeting. Students from the Convent of Jesus and Mary RC Language College had submitted questions from which the following three had been selected and leading members answered each in turn.

The first question was asked by Elizabeth Adeogun. She asked what methods were being employed to counter the depression. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Lorber replied that the economic situation appeared bleak and that local people would feel the impact. The Council was working on supporting people to get into work. It was

doing this through Brent in2work which assisted the long-term unemployed to return to work and to gain higher levels of earnings. This included a scheme called Language2work which helped people to improve their English skills and give them practical advice on how to develop their skills to find a job. Wembley Works had recently been launched which aimed to provide skills training and job opportunities so that local people could access the jobs that would become available in the Wembley City development as it was built over the next few years. Councillor Lorber added that the Council would be working with Brent Housing Partnership and other providers of social housing to deal with homelessness which could become a bigger problem in the current economic climate. He was pleased that the Council would soon be building new homes in the borough for the first time in many years. The Council would continue with its major regeneration programme and to invest in local services, by modernising them, building a new civic centre and at the same time keep Council Tax rises as low as possible.

The Leader of the Opposition Group, Councillor John replied that actions were being taken by the Government to deal with the economic situation and the Council would have to follow this lead. Levels of public spending were to be maintained and in turn it was hoped that this would mean that the most vulnerable people would be offered some protection. Councillor John expressed her support for the activities referred to by the Leader of the Council regarding the provision of housing and getting local people into work.

The second question was asked by Ciara McCombe. She asked if there was another way to combat youth crime other than throwing money at it.

The Lead Member for Crime Prevention and Public Safety, Councillor Matthews replied that this was one of the top priorities for the Council. It was working in partnership with other agencies on providing more opportunities for young people. Councillor Matthews added that young people needed support from their schools as well as their parents and from councillors. The Council had established a Youth Parliament in order to be able to hear the views of young people. It was important to recognise that the levels of youth violence and personal robbery were down in Brent and that it was only a very small percentage of young people that were involved in criminal activity.

Speaking for the Opposition Group, Councillor Beswick replied that there was a tendency to always blame young people for committing crime and it was often not the case. The Council and other agencies needed to consult with and listen to young people more in order that they could have an input into the decisions taken that affected their lives. He felt that the resources put into supporting young people were not always joined up to make them most effective.

The final question was asked by Katie Walsh. She asked why environmental issues were made such an important political issue but a proper recycling programme could not be implemented for all areas.

The Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture, Councillor Van Colle replied that there was a good recycling programme underway within Brent. In 2003 there was a recycling rate of 6% and this had risen to 30%. Recycling was undertaken in a number of ways; through kerbside collection from households, including plastic bottles and organic waste, 150 on-street recycling facilities and the Reuse and Recycling Centre in Park Royal. Councillor Van Colle acknowledged that not all households in the borough could be provided with the bins used for recycling usually because of lack of space and that some flats still did not have facilities for recycling but the Council was aware of this and was trying to include as many properties as possible. The Council had ambitious targets to increase the rate of recycling and viewed this a priority.

Speaking as the opposition spokesperson for Environment, Planning and Culture, Councillor Powney replied that he felt the Council had moved to compulsory recycling a bit prematurely when it still had not been able to provide everybody with a green bin. There was also still no doorstep provision for recycling cardboard and some properties above shops were not allowed green bins. Councillor Powney felt that the Council had been wrong to introduce a charge of £25 for removal of bulky waste items. Councillor Powney added that a major constraint to increasing recycling was that some material was not collected because there was nowhere to take it to. This was a national issue that needed to be addressed by the Government.

Members thanked the students for their interest and for the questions put.

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.

Brothels and prostitutes in Brent

The question from Councillor John had asked how many brothels and prostitutes there were in Brent and whether the Administration agreed with making it easier for 16 year olds to engage with the sex trade. Councillor John added that whilst prostitution was a problem within her ward she wished to broaden the area her question covered. She asked as a supplementary question if any preparatory work was being undertaken in advance of the 2012 Olympics given that it was known

that such events gave rise to an increase in the sex trade, particularly around large sporting venues like Wembley Stadium.

Councillor Matthews (Lead Member for Crime Prevention and Public Safety) replied that the matter raised by Councillor John could be included in the overview and scrutiny review referred to in her original answer, where the scale of the problem and the types of prostitution could be identified.

Action against anti social behaviour

The question from Councillor Powney had asked how many Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), Acceptable Behaviour Agreements and Dispersal Zones had the Council issued in each of the years since 2003, what the policy on their use was and who formalised and scrutinised their use. Councillor Powney asked as a supplementary question what member involvement there was in monitoring anti-social behaviour, in particular which body of elected members scrutinised progress and the reports referred to in the final paragraph of the original answer he had received and what ways the policies of the Council on crime had changed as a result of the current Liberal Democrat/Conservative joint administration taking control.

Councillor Matthews (Lead Member for Crime Prevention and Public Safety) replied that the Council had invested in additional CCTV with the Willesden area the first to benefit from this. An extra 16 Police Community Support Officers had been provided for and the Council worked closely with other agencies to deal with the problem of graffiti. The Council continued to push to reduce crime and the rate of crime continued to fall.

Council Tax levels

The question from Councillor Butt had asked if the Council Tax rise would be lower or in line with the 0% pledge made by the Liberal Democrats at the May 2006 local elections now that inflation was falling. Councillor Butt added that Labour made just one promise on Council Tax and that was to keep the Council Tax at or below the London average and the Liberal Democrats' alternative proposals had always been within pence of Labour's. He submitted that Labour kept its promise and the Liberal Democrats had so far failed to keep theirs. As a supplementary question, Councillor Butt asked if there would be a guarantee to freeze the Council Tax as promised at the last local elections.

Councillor Lorber (Leader of the Council) responded by expressing surprise that a member of the Opposition felt he could win an argument about the level of Council Tax when his party had been responsible for increasing Council Tax by 100% during their time in power. Councillor Lorber gave an assurance that the Council Tax would be kept as low

as possible. The current year's increase had been lower than inflation and it would be proposed that next year's was as well.

Death of 'Baby P'

The question from Councillor Arnold had asked what action the Council was taking to ensure its child protection policies and procedures were sufficiently robust in light of the tragic death of 'Baby P'. Councillor Arnold referred to the high profile media coverage on the death of 'Baby P' which had raised questions about children's social care and in turn had led to an increase in the number of referrals, rising concern amongst professionals and created a public debate. She stated that she did not wish to fuel the negative comments and put more pressure on committed hard working social workers but wanted to know how well they were supported with supervision, a reasonable workload, performance reviews and workforce development. In assuming that all the serious case reviews were up to date, Councillor Arnold asked as her supplementary question how many social worker posts were vacant, where the Council was targeting its recruitment advertising and whether social workers were included in the workforce development programme. Noting that the new locality team arrangements were due to start in February 2009, Councillor Arnold asked if it was anticipated that there would be vacant posts in the service and if so whether incentives were needed for recruitment and retention. Finally, she reminded Members that they were all corporate parents for Looked After children and she would welcome any information on how they could better support these children.

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member for Children and Families) welcomed the nature of Councillor Arnold's question. He expressed his concern that some press coverage in connection with the 'Baby P' case would make the job of looking after vulnerable children more difficult. His greatest concern was the Council's ability to recruit and retain experienced social workers. He referred to the strategy behind introducing locality working which would allow staff to get closer to the families they were working with. He confirmed that the Council had sought to recruit social workers from the USA and South Africa, but stressed that it had not been alone in making this approach. He undertook to provide the information requested on the number of vacant posts and those filled by agency staff.

(See also question from Councillor Mrs Fernandes below).

Parking provision for teachers

The question from Councillor Long had asked what the Council's policy was on parking for teachers at schools without on-site parking. Councillor Long added that the answer she had received did not account for the size of the school and as her supplementary question

she asked if the one size fits all policy for Special Parking Arrangements for Schools would be reviewed.

Councillor D Brown (Lead Member for Transport and Highways) replied that there were 42 primary schools with approved travel plans and reported the number of permits allocated to the schools. He pointed out that the current scheme was the same as that operated under the previous Administration and there were no plans to review it.

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

Exam achievement

The question from Councillor Tancred had asked for the number of children in Brent schools achieving 5 GCSEs at Grade A*- C. As a supplementary question Councillor Tancred asked how the results compared to previous years and with other Councils.

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member for Children and Families) replied that the average number of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE grade C or above including Maths and English was 56%. Most schools had made significant advances in the level of achievement by pupils, including the Convent of Jesus and Mary RC Language College, pupils from which were present at the Council meeting. He congratulated the staff at these schools. Brent's performance compared very favourably with other London councils.

Cancellation of firework display at Roundwood Park

The question from Councillor Clues had asked for reassurance that the cancellation of the Roundwood Park fireworks had not been a cost saving measure. In a supplementary question he asked if it could be made absolutely clear that the Council's prime concern was for people's safety and to prevent avoidable injury. He wanted to know if the Executive shared his disdain at Councillor Powney's claim that the firework cancellation had been a savings exercise.

Councillor Van Colle (Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture) replied that he was certainly able to give the assurance sought that the Council cared about public safety and he confirmed that this was the sole reason for why the event had been cancelled. No money had been saved because the cancellation had been too soon before the event to allow for recovery of the costs incurred.

Working Neighbourhood Fund

The question from Councillor Gupta had asked about a Government letter indicating that Brent would lose £4.4M of Working Neighbourhood Fund money during the current year and more in 2010/11, why this

was, whether a response had been sent from the Council and whether leading members would be lobbying against this decision. Councillor Gupta expressed his concern at this situation and as a supplementary question asked what the impact of losing the money would be on job training and skills schemes at a time when the economy was in crisis and whether there was any indication yet of support from MPs or others for the Council's lobbying efforts.

Councillor Lorber (Leader of the Council) replied that he was extremely concerned over what had happened when in the first place the Government had given Brent the money and now mid year was taking it away. He stated that there were agencies effectively operating in the borough helping people into work, it was recognised that worklessness bore a close relationship to other social problems and that the impact of the Government's intentions would be to endanger the support currently in place. He confirmed that he was working hard to make representations to the Government and that this had the support of Sarah Teather, MP. He hoped Brent's other two MPs would also support the Council's position.

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

School places

The question from Councillor Mistry had asked for details of the number of empty places at each primary school in Brent divided by year group. She referred to the number of spare places at a number of the schools as set out in the original answer she had received. As a supplementary question she asked how the building of the temporary accommodation at the Wembley Park site could be justified when even at the temporary Wembley Academy there were eight spare places. She asked where the demand was given the current amount of spare capacity at schools in the North of the borough.

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member for Children and Families) replied that he thought the majority of councillors would be pleased that the Council was addressing the shortage of school places. There was currently a 5% spare capacity rate and the Audit Commission recommended it should be at least at this level. At reception class level children from 4 years upwards were enrolled and the level of in-year applications for school places was very high. It was therefore likely that all spare capacity would be taken up by the end of the current school year. As for the sports facilities on the Wembley Park site, Councillor Wharton explained that 20,000 old tyres had been removed from the site so that an area could be made available for football.

Death of 'Baby P'

The question from Councillor Mrs Fernandes had asked what action the Council was taking to ensure that children in Brent were properly safeguarded in light of the tragic death of 'Baby P'. Councillor Mrs Fernandes added that following the Victoria Climbié case it was shocking to see a similar case again and stressed the importance of lessons being learnt. She expressed concerns about the ability to recruit suitable staff and as a supplementary question asked what systems were in place to ensure senior managers supported frontline staff and how it could be made sure that staff were well trained.

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member for Children and Families) replied by acknowledging the concerns regarding the need to support staff in doing a difficult job. He explained that a report had been commissioned into the staffing requirements, how other boroughs addressed similar issues and the administrative back up required. He hoped the report could be made available to members in due course. In the meantime an allowance had been made in-year for additional staff to be appointed.

(See also question from Councillor Arnold above)

9. Items selected by Non-Executive Members

(i) Non-executive member items

Councillor Beswick introduced the item he had raised which suggested that the non-executive member items were a waste of time because the issues raised were rarely acted upon in any meaningful way. He felt that either the Executive should be required to consider the items raised or that consideration should be given to removing the item.

Councillor Blackman expressed his disappointment at seeing this matter raised in this way. The intention of the item was to provide an opportunity for all non-executive members to raise an item of concern to them. He commented that it was unfortunate that Councillor Beswick had used his turn to suggest abolishing the item. He acknowledged that there was a feeling amongst members that most Council meetings had become irrelevant but it was important that all members had an opportunity to raise items and when necessary get the Executive to consider them

Councillor Sneddon (Lead Member for Human Resources and Diversity, Local Democracy and Consultation) responded by reminding members that the Council's constitution had been agreed by a cross party group of councillors after a long series of meetings. Whilst he was prepared to agree to reconsider aspects of it where there was consensus he would not agree to re-opening discussions on a broader review of the constitution. He stated that it was in any case not a

matter for the Executive but he undertook to raise the issue with the Borough Solicitor.

(ii) Opportunities for our young people

Councillor Hirani introduced the item he had raised which asked the Executive to continue to ensure adequate provision existed for young people to ensure the best possible outcomes for them. He added that the rebuilding and redevelopment of playgrounds and the establishment of the Youth Parliament were two good examples of the Council's progress in providing opportunities for young people in the borough.

A view was put that, whilst recognising that the Council had made young people one of its themed priorities and that the ambition was to provide an integrated youth service, it did not appear that youth workers were aware of this and National Youth Work week on 1st to 7th November had passed by with no mention of it. It was suggested that despite many initiatives being raised many young people still had nowhere to go. The Building Schools for the Future programme needed to be pursued, funding opportunities from the Learning and Skills Council explored and opportunities for young people to get on to the employment ladder provided.

Councillor Lorber (Leader of the Council) stated that young people had been given priority as one of the four key themes for the Council. Efforts were underway to invest in the borough's schools which would provide opportunities to expand youth provision and he contrasted this with the lack of progress on the Copeland school redevelopment proposals agreed by the previous administration. The Council now supported a Youth Parliament where the views of young people were listened to. A new grants structure had been agreed that would provide for priority projects to be supported. Councillor Lorber agreed that action was needed and stated that action was being taken. Councillor Wharton (Lead Member for Children and Families) added that the Executive would continue to address the needs of young people.

(iii) Tackling homophobic bullying

Councillor Motley introduced the item he had raised which expressed concern that anti gay bullying amongst young people was on the increase and asked the Executive to explore what more could be done to tackle this. He added that whilst a lot of work had gone into dealing with racist bullying there had been little attention paid to homophobic bullying which was now regarded as a major issue. Councillor Motley stated that 65% to 75% of young gay people had been subject to homophobic bullying and yet only 25% of young people had been given the message in schools that it was wrong. There was evidence to show that when the message was given out at schools there was a

60% reduction in such bullying indicating that taking action had an effect.

It was agreed that homophobic bullying was as bad as racist bullying and was designated as a hate crime. Yet according to police figures the number of homophobic crimes was increasing.

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member for Children and Families) said he was pleased that Councillor Motley as Chair of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee had raised this matter. Work was underway to review the anti-bullying policies in schools and the views of Stonewall would be sought. He confirmed that the Executive would continue to pursue this matter.

RESOLVED:-

that the responses provided by the Lead Members on the above items indicating that the Executive cannot accept the item raised on Non-Executive Member Items and will pursue the items raised concerning Opportunities for Young People and Tackling Homophobic Bullying be accepted.

10. **Report from the Executive**

Service Improvement and Efficiency

Councillor Lorber stated that around 70 projects were underway looking at areas across the Council where the service to people and efficiency might be improved. This was very important in light of the financial situation facing the Council and the level of improved efficiency would determine the level of improved services.

Graffiti strategy

Councillor Lorber referred to tackling graffiti as an important issue that affected some areas of the borough more than others. A strategy would be developed that could work for the whole of the borough

Sports facilities

Councillor Van Colle reported that the Executive had considered a very good report on sports facilities in the borough. The prime consideration was the provision of a swimming pool in the north of the borough. The decisions of the Executive on the report had been called-in and would now be considered by the Forward Plan Select Committee.

Recycling update

Councillor Van Colle referred to the answer he had given to the question raised by a student of the Convent of Jesus and Mary RC

Language College under question time. A lot of work was taking place at London Council level and he would be part of a delegation to the London Mayor's advisor on this. In the meantime the rate of recycling in the borough continued to rise and the introduction of compulsory recycling had been a huge success.

BHP housing

Councillor Allie was pleased to report that after a long time during which the Council had had to address a rising waiting list, Brent Housing Partnership would soon be building new homes in the borough giving local residents an increased element of choice.

RESOLVED:-

that the report from the Executive be noted.

11. Report from the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny

Councillor Jones presented her report on the work of overview and scrutiny. She pointed out that the Health Select Committee had recently met at Northwick Park hospital and she was interested to hear if members had any better insight into the running of the hospital. The Budget Panel was continuing its work on scrutinising the budget. It was still intended that a visit to Strathcona Day Centre by members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee take place. Councillor Jones reported that the response from Executive members to the work undertaken by overview and scrutiny ranged from full engagement to a lack of any response and so the Forward Plan Select Committee had asked that Executive members be briefed on the role of overview and scrutiny so that a greater consistency of response could be reached.

RESOLVED:-

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

12. 1st Reading Debate – 2009/10 to 2012/13 Budget

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 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 report pointed out that there was considerably more certainty about external funding than at the equivalent time the previous year when the council was still waiting to find out the implications of the Comprehensive Spending Review for Formula Grant, Area Based Grant and other specific grants. For this

year, the council knew how much Formula Grant would increase by - 1.75% next year and 1.5% the year after. At the same stage last year, the council was also uncertain about the position with the Primary Care Trust. That issue had now been largely resolved. Officers had also believed that there was a high degree of certainty about funding that would be available as part of Area Based Grant and specific grants until a recent government consultation on a proposed reduction in Brent's allocation of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund in 2009/10 and 2010/11. In addition, the significant changes which had happened to the economy over the past 12 months – and the uncertainty about the future of the economy – meant that underlying assumptions about pay and price increases, interest rates, service pressures and other items within the council's medium term financial strategy would have to be kept under close review.

Councillor Blackman referred to the Chancellor's statement earlier that day and remarked that there was no extra money for local authorities to be able to tackle the local issues caused by the economic downturn and that the Government was gambling with the country's future. He highlighted the threat to the Council if the proposed changes to the allocation of the Working Neighbourhoods Fund were to be implemented. Over the three year period the previously agreed allocation of £8.3M would be reduced to £4.3M meaning some schemes would have to cease or funding switched from other schemes. There would be big challenges ahead for the Council in light of the Government's allowance for budgets to increase by less than current inflation. Councillor Blackman commented on the increase in the availability of specific grants that allowed the Government to centrally control what Councils spent such money on. He pointed out that the savings so far identified fell short of the 3% efficiency target by £1.9M and that a significantly greater level of savings were required to be in a position of limiting a Council Tax rise to 5%. His personal preference was for a zero rise in Council Tax but he expected that budget pressures would lead to a middle position. Councillor Blackman welcomed the news that the Mayor of London was to freeze the GLA's element of the Council Tax. He summarised that the Council had to find between £4.5M and £9.4M savings in order to produce a balanced budget set against priority areas for growth that had been identified. Every proposal would be considered and examined.

Councillor John responded by stating that there was a long tradition of governments centralising spending decisions and so this situation was nothing new. Out of a budget of close to £1 billion she felt it should be possible to find 3% savings each year. She recollected that the previous year the Administration had blamed inflation and the small increase in the GLA precept for not being able to keep down the Council Tax and now it was blaming the reduction in the Working Neighbourhood Fund. She pointed out that this fund was outside the main spend programmes and asked what had been done to get the

proposal to reduce the fund reversed. She referred to the successful actions taken by her Administration when it was faced with losing significant levels of funding and urged the current Administration to lobby effectively for the Council's cause. Councillor John stated that the failure of the Administration to keep to its pre-election promise on keeping down the Council Tax was not the only area where it had failed to deliver and referred to a number of issues including plans for free parking permits, Dollis Hill House, Barham Park estate, the delay on the Wembley City Academy, no new proposals for Queens Park or South Kilburn as further examples. Councillor John concluded that a lack of vision by the Council leadership was causing the people of Brent to suffer.

Councillor Lorber opened his address by thanking officers for the work put into producing the report now before members. He referred to the Prime Minister's admission that the country was in recession and acknowledged that local people would suffer as a result. He expressed his view that the current economic position had not been helped by the past actions of the Prime Minister in trying to buy the country's way out of the situation. The Council would be faced with protecting services for the most vulnerable and achieving efficiencies would be the answer to many of the spending issues facing the Council. The priority for the Council was to deliver on its 4 core themes and its achievements could already be seen. Despite the Government betraying the people of South Kilburn, Councillor Lorber stated that the Council was still committed to developing a scheme of mixed tenure housing in the area. He also referred to falling crime rates, continued support for the Not Another Drop campaign, a programme of regeneration including proposals along the North Circular Road, completion of up to 500 new homes, the opening of Wembley Works, the success of Brent in2work, a voice for young people, improved performance in schools, a programme of environmental improvements leading to cleaner streets and reduced dumping, the introduction of compulsory recycling and the planting of over 2000 new trees. Councillor Lorber stated that he was proud of the Council's achievements so far and more was to come such as further investment in CCTV, additional funding for Police Community Support Officers, additional resources to support young people and vulnerable people, a programme of rebuilding schools, investing in Sure Start in Children Centres, plans for a new civic centre as part of a major programme of transformation for the Council, a green travel plan for staff and making everybody responsible for their actions in improving the environment. Councillor Lorber ended by saying he would continue to make Brent a borough of opportunity whilst still keeping Council Tax increases to below the level of inflation.

Councillor Arnold requested that the Council build confidence in the education system by co-operating with schools on the schools strategy, including exploring the provision of more academies. Other aspects of children's services she wanted resources put into included more staff in the youth offending service and investment in integrated services. She

also asked for Kilburn Job Centre plus to be reprieved and for funding to be restored to the Kilburn Business partnership* to support the work of developing the Kilburn High Road.

Councillor Joseph supported the proposals for resourcing the protection of vulnerable people, especially the young, additional Police Community Support Officers, additional CCTV and asked that the area around Kensal Green station be covered by CCTV. She also asked that resources be put into repairing pavements.

Councillor Motley referred to the changing nature of the Chamberlayne Road area and hoped that the Council's regeneration policy would not lose sight of the need to offer assistance to smaller areas in the borough to help them regenerate.

Councillor Long expressed concern that Council staff positions were being kept vacant in order to save money and hoped this would not continue. She requested that efforts be made to ensure every area of the borough benefited from the support of a Street Care officer. She also mentioned the need for additional IT support for homeworkers given the problems councillors experienced.

Councillor HB Patel spoke in support of the priorities pursued by the Administration but made a request for increased spending on maintaining roads and pavements with special mention of some of those in his ward. He added a plea that the Council Tax rise should not be too high.

Councillor R Moher referred to the reduction in the provision for inescapable growth from the figure of £9.2M previously allowed for to a proposed level of £2.6M, despite the acknowledgement that the economic climate would lead to increased pressure on services and some existing budgets were projecting overspends. Added to this was the pressure on children's social services which could undermine the transformation programme underway and so she asked that this figure be reconsidered.

Councillor Detre spoke in support of the Administration's record stating that good progress was being in South Kilburn, extra Police Community Support Officers were being taken on and the Council's interest in maximising the potential of the Olympics was being pursued. He was also glad to hear that the whole Council was behind efforts being made to avoid any reduction in the level of Working Neighbourhoods funding.

Councillor Powney referred to the level of balances being lower than recommended by officers and asked what the position of the Lead Member for Corporate Resources was on this. He also asked what level of inflation was being used to measure the rise in Council Tax.

*amended at Council on 26 January 2009

Councillor Mistry made reference to the theme of making the borough a lively place to live in and the Council's sports facilities review in stressing the importance of healthy living. In support of this Councillor Mistry asked that the borough's green spaces have some sports facilities put into them.

Councillor Wharton responded to the request that children's services be protected by giving assurances that this would be the case and referring to the investment going into the service.

Councillor Thomas commented that he could not see any evidence from the report before members that the Council was ready to deal with the impact of the crisis affecting the country. There was the admission that the level of savings had not so far been achieved and this questioned whether services could be maintained. He felt that rubbish on the streets was getting worse by reference to his ward and this led to the increased threat of rats. Councillor Thomas asked that the £25 charge for clearing bulky rubbish be removed.

Councillor Van Kalwala stated that the Council's investment strategy needed to be reviewed in light of recent world events. This would include looking at the types of investments made, covering risks and ensuring ethical investment decisions were taken. He felt members knew little of the Council's investments.

RESOLVED:-

that the reports from the Executive and the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources on the 1st Reading of the 2009/10 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.

The meeting ended at 10:15 pm

R FOX
Mayor