

## **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, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2009** 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	Kansagra
Mrs Bacchus	J Long
Baker	Lorber
Bessong	Malik
Beswick	Matthews
Blackman	Mendoza
D Brown	Mistry
V Brown	J Moher
Butt	R Moher
Castle	Moloney
Chavda	Motley
Clues	Pagnamenta
Colwill	CJ Patel
Corcoran	H B Patel
Crane	H M Patel
Cummins	Powney
Detre	Shah
Dunn	Ms C Shaw
Dunwell	Singh
Eniola	Sneddon
Mrs Fernandes	Tancred
Green	Thomas
Gupta	Van Colle
Hashmi	Van Kalwala
Hirani	Wharton
Jackson	

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Coughlin, Farrell, Leaman and Steel.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting of full Council held on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2008 be confirmed as a true and accurate record subject to the 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph of minute no. 12 on the 1<sup>st</sup> Reading Debate – 2009/10 to 2012/13 Budget being amended to refer to the Kilburn Business partnership, not the South Kilburn partnership.

3. **Declarations of Interests**

At this meeting there were none.

4. **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor congratulated Councillor Ann John on being awarded an OBE in the New Year's Honour's list. He stated that this was a well deserved award for a truly dedicated councillor. Councillor John would be receiving her award from H M The Queen on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2009.

The Mayor also congratulated all of the Brent residents who received awards in the New Year's Day Honour's list.

The Mayor announced that Brent schools had recorded their best ever GCSE results with 56% of pupils achieving the new benchmark of 5 A-C GCSEs, including English and Maths, compared with 51% in 2007. This was well above the national average of 48% and the London average of 51%. Brent was now ranked in the top 20 of 150 local authorities for GCSE results, for the progress students make in school and also for the most GCSE improvement over the last ten years. The Mayor congratulated Brent students and schools for their outstanding achievements.

The Mayor announced that councillors had requested that their condolences be conveyed to all whose relatives or friends were killed in the recent Mumbai tragedies. He also sent condolences to Brent residents affected by the tragic situation in the Gaza region.

The Mayor was pleased to report that Councillor Steel was improving well and was home from hospital following surgery. Councillor Steel had asked that his thanks be conveyed to everyone for all the continued well wishes he had received.

The Mayor announced that the New Year's Day Parade had been a great success. Brent's entry, which featured young people from the borough, came 7<sup>th</sup> out of all the London Boroughs and received a prize of £1,500 for his charity appeal. He thanked all those who took part.

The Mayor announced that he would be holding a Musical Gala on the afternoon of Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> April in the Paul Daisley Hall and hoped as many members as possible would be able to attend the event.

The Mayor drew attention to the list of current petitions showing progress on dealing with them that had been circulated around the chamber.

## 5. **Procedural motion**

Councillor Bessong moved a procedural motion circulated in his and Councillor Colwill's names seeking agreement on bringing forward consideration of item 9 – Motions selected by the Group Leaders, which was put to the vote and declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED:

that the order of business listed on the summons be amended to allow for Item 9 - Motions selected by the Group Leaders - to be brought forward and taken immediately, preceding item 5 – Appointments to Committees/ Appointment of Chairs/ Vice-Chairs (if any) - after which the order shall be as listed on the summons.

## 6. **Motions selected by the Group Leaders**

### *(a) Increase in care charges*

The motion in the name of the Leader of the Labour Group sought to reject any proposals to increase care charges by more than the current rate of inflation. Councillor John in moving her motion, anticipated the Government being blamed for the increase in charges but pointed out that not all Councils were doing this. She referred to the problems encountered on consulting on the proposals and how this had led to the need to consult a second time. She submitted that the lack of notice given by the Council to the consultation had not allowed enough time for responses and the Council had been forced to extend the deadline. Councillor John also criticised the extent of the consultation, saying that the voluntary sector and those organisations that worked with the residents had not been invited to comment. She asked if it was right to place such a burden on some of the most vulnerable residents in the borough.

In response it was pointed out that the Council was currently consulting service users on three proposals, which were to introduce a charge for day care at a rate of £3.75 per session, to increase the charge for extra

care sheltered social care to £116.55 per week and to introduce a charge for re-enablement care at the same hourly rate as is currently charged for homecare. The consultation included an advertisement in the Willesden & Brent Times and on the Council website, the distribution of leaflets to all service users of day care sheltered accommodation and to all Brent public libraries and one stop shops. When it was suggested that not everyone that might have expected to see the consultation had done so the decision was taken to extend the consultation period until 19<sup>th</sup> March 2009. No decision would be taken until the results of the consultation were reported back to the Executive.

It was submitted that although it was difficult to begin to levy charges for services that had previously not been charged for it was correct that this was being done. It had to be borne in mind that a majority of the residents would probably not have to pay the charge because they were on benefit. It was important that the Council Taxpayer did not have to meet the cost for those that could afford to pay. The view was put that it should not be assumed that the elderly wished to be dependent on the local authority and that the state should only meet the cost of provision as a last resort when the needs of the individual required this. If someone could afford to pay then they had to but if someone could not afford to pay then they would not have to. Another view was put that there were other ways in which the Council could bridge the budget gap it faced without resorting to charging for elderly care.

Reference was made to a leaflet published by the Liberal Democrats in 2006 which called for free personal care for the elderly. The inadequacy of the consultation carried out was raised and it was submitted that only local press interest had prompted an extension of the time frame for responding to the consultation.

It was explained that the Council had raised its concerns over cuts in resources at Ministerial level but had been left to manage the situation as it existed. This had been done within a framework of protecting the most vulnerable. The Council was already having to fund the consequences of PCT cost shunting and would have less money to spend on other services. In answering the criticism levelled at the consultation carried out, it was put that the Council wished to genuinely consult on the proposals before agreeing anything. A balancing act had to be performed in taking account of the costs of the service and the burden on the taxpayer. In compiling the Council's budget for 2009/10 no reduction in the budget for adult social care had been sought and it was expected that the service would manage with the resources allocated to it which were the most generous ever.

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

*(b) Promoting greener travel*

The motion in the name of the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group sought support for the Council's Greener Travel proposals for Brent and expressed disappointment at the increase in tube and rail fares. Councillor Cummins moved the motion on behalf of the Leader and in support he added that the Liberal Democrat Group was committed to improving the environment and quality of life. This had begun with an improvement in the cleanliness of the streets, greater recycling, encouragement of environment friendly cars and now the Council's Green Travel plan. He stated that the Mayor of London's decision to increase tube and rail fares undermined the efforts of the Council.

In supporting the motion it was pointed out that whilst the GLA precept was set not to rise for next year, fares were being increased to make up for this. It was claimed that such an approach hit the poorest hardest as they were likely to use public transport the most as well as having a detrimental effect on the environment.

It was pointed out that the Mayor of London was delivering on his election promise to extend the freedom pass and to carry out an overhaul of the complicated budget for Transport for London. This had led to a need to increase fares by, in some cases, up to 10%. In addition, the proposal to charge for parking at the Town Hall was opposed, as was the unnecessary car journeys the new academy at Wembley would encourage.

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

**RESOLVED:**

that as a forward looking Borough, this Council believes that it is only through encouraging lifestyle changes that the environment can be protected and a sustainable future for both Brent and Britain can be secured and maintained. These changes extend from measures as simple as recycling more and more regularly, to more fundamental changes such as alternative travel to work.

Council therefore welcomes proposals to introduce a range of measures designed to encourage Green Travel in Brent and will commit to its Local Area Agreement target of Carbon Dioxide reduction as soon as the base level is set.

Council notes however its disappointment that adequate thought has not been given to this agenda by the London Mayor, not least in terms of his decision to raise Tube and Rail fares by well over the rate of inflation and on some tariffs by as much as 10 per cent. This Council expresses concern that this will do nothing to encourage increased use of public transport by residents or Council staff.

Brent Council commits to continuing to play its part in encouraging the important changes needed to help ensure a sustainable future for all.

*(c) United London Stands declaration*

The motion in the name of the Leader of the Conservative Group expressed concern over the recent escalation in violent attacks on certain sections of the borough's community and sought to endorse the United London Stands declaration. Councillor Blackman referred to the Holocaust Memorial Day held the previous day and the recent arson attacks on the Brondesbury Park synagogue and Buddhist Centre in Kingsbury and reported attacks on school children attending the Jewish Free School. He referred to the statement by United London Stands which had been circulated to all members. He stated that there could be no place for religious hatred within the borough and that a clear message needed to be sent out that the Council would not tolerate any form of religious intolerance.

Members spoke in support of the motion, referring to the Council's track record in promoting community cohesion and in resisting those that tried to undermine this. It was submitted that whilst some people might hold strong views about events taking place in the world this did not justify attacking people and places. Differences of opinion needed to be addressed in words not violence. A call was made for the police to continue to be vigilant in protecting all the diverse communities that lived side by side in the borough.

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

RESOLVED:

This Council reiterates its commitment to ensuring the safety and security of all Brent residents and expresses concern about the recent escalation of violent attacks on certain sections of the community.

This Council expresses sympathy to the relatives and friends of victims of the Mumbai massacre and condemns the violent attacks on the multi-cultural community in Mumbai.

This Council condemns the recent rise in anti-Semitic attacks in Brent including the recent arson attack on Brondesbury Park synagogue and reported attacks on schoolchildren travelling to JFS. This Council believes that this is particularly significant as we have recently commemorated Holocaust Memorial Day.

This Council notes that the police are stepping up security patrols and assisting local religious groups to ensure that residents can celebrate their religious beliefs in safety.

This Council calls for extra vigilance around places of religious worship and faith schools where there is a potential for offensive graffiti, arson attacks or physical assaults to take place and endorses the 'United London Stands' declaration as proposed by the London Jewish Forum.

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

RESOLVED:-

that the following change to the membership of the Standards Committee be agreed:

Member	1 <sup>st</sup> alternate	2 <sup>nd</sup> alternate
Councillor J Moher to replace Councillor Powney	Councillor Butt to replace Councillor John	Councillor Beswick to replace Councillor Ahmed

**8. 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.

*Increasing opportunities for apprenticeships for young people*

The question from Councillor Arnold had asked how the Council was contributing to increasing opportunities for apprenticeships for young people. She added that the Council needed to take a strong lead in this area. Previous work had identified that young people in the borough most wanted help with getting on to the employment ladder. Councillor Arnold stated that other boroughs had strong employer partnerships. As a supplementary question she asked how the Council would ensure the government target that no school or college leaver was excluded from the labour market would reach those most vulnerable and what was being done to boost employer partnerships to make sure there were starter and part-time jobs for students and young people rather than leaving it to the local economy and market forces.

Councillor Wharton replied that the apprenticeship scheme the Council was setting up was a good example of what could be done but the Council could not be expected to do everything in the face of the worse economic depression for years. He also referred to the loss of Working Neighbourhood Fund monies that the Council had been led to believe it

would receive. Such programmes were long term and it was very disruptive when funding was withdrawn in such a way.

#### *Use of bailiffs*

The question from Councillor Crane had asked how many times in the last 12 months the Council had used bailiffs to recover Council Tax payments and if there was any intention to review the procedures in light of the economic downturn. He added that he was concerned at the affect the global credit crunch was having on elderly people who were seeing a decline in income from their savings. In a recent newspaper report Brent had been identified as one of the councils at the top of a list of those which most aggressively chased debt. He agreed that those who did not pay over a long period needed to be pursued but some people were facing difficulties that had arisen quite suddenly. Councillor Crane felt that those who could afford to pay should be pursued but those that were in difficulty as a result of recent events should be supported. He asked as a supplementary question how many bankruptcy orders had been applied for in the current year compared to the previous two or three years.

Councillor Blackman acknowledged the financial problems ahead for many people and that the Council owed a duty of care but one which had to be paid for by those who could afford to pay. Those on low income were encouraged to seek the benefits to which they were entitled, whilst others chose not to pay and built up large arrears. Councillor Blackman stated that the Council had to use the threat of bankruptcy in some cases against some people who only paid their debts when the bailiffs arrived and would continue to do so. He undertook to supply Councillor Crane with the specific information he had sought.

#### *Families in temporary accommodation*

The question from Councillor Jones had asked what was being done to reduce the number of families with children in temporary accommodation. Her question had made the point that according to official government figures Brent was the third highest in London for using temporary accommodation for families with children and it was often of poor quality. She asked as a supplementary question how many children were currently in overcrowded temporary accommodation awaiting relocation to more suitable temporary housing, what their average stay was and what was being done to address this.

In reply, Councillor Allie referred to past numbers of families in temporary accommodation which increased during the period 2003-5 but came down in 2006 and continued to do so.

### *Assessments of vulnerable elderly persons*

The question from Councillor R Moher had asked what the timescale was for making assessments and what statistics there were to show how many were completed within the timescale. She added that the answer she had received raised concern because of the number of cases that were not dealt with within the timeframe laid down and suggested this was because of a shortage of staff. As a supplementary question, Councillor R Moher asked whether steps would be taken to reverse the trend towards delaying the recruitment of permanent staff and if savings from the Council's transformation programme would be used to ensure full staffing of qualified and experienced social workers in order to be sure of carrying out all assessments within time.

In reply, Councillor Colwill referred to a past case he had raised as an urgent matter and which had been dealt with quickly and expressed confidence that if urgent cases were brought to the attention of the Council they would be dealt with. In the circumstances he felt that elderly people in need were cared for in a proper way.

### *ENCAMS street cleaning figures*

The question from Councillor Powney had asked what the ENCAMS street cleaning figures were for the last three inspections, how they had been publicised and if they showed an improvement or decline. Councillor Powney stated that the answer he had received did not address the issue of publicity where it appeared that the favourable tranche 1 figures had received prominent press coverage but the less favourable tranche 2 figures had not been publicised. He went on to refer to the £25 charge for bulky waste collection and drew attention to a leaflet from the Liberal Democrats issued some time ago which advertised the then free service for collection of bulky items. As a supplementary question he asked when and for what reason did the Liberal Democrats decide to reverse the free collection policy.

In reply, Councillor D Brown stated that the question from Councillor Powney had been clear and did not refer to the charge for bulky waste. He reminded the Council that the service was still free to a number of residents on low income and that the service was never truly free because it was paid for out of the Council Tax. He reasserted that Brent was now a cleaner place as had been publicised in the Brent magazine.

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

### *Rent rises*

Councillor Clues had asked why rents were to rise by well over the rate of inflation. He hoped that the Council would do what it could to defend

the most vulnerable tenants and lobby Government for an equitable settlement. As a supplementary question Councillor Clues asked if this was the worst possible two years for those in rented accommodation who were seeing their rents rise because the Government was determined to make councils charge more to those with least financial independence.

In reply, Councillor Allie agreed and pointed out that the Government had been siphoning money from tenants for many years.

#### *Brent Youth Parliament*

The question from Councillor Bessong had asked for an update on the work of the Brent Youth Parliament. He felt the answer he had received was extremely positive and congratulated the lead member on taking forward this initiative. Councillor Bessong felt that this provided meaningful engagement and consultation with young people, ensuring that policies and services reflected not just their needs but their wishes.

Councillor Matthews expressed her full support for the work the Council was doing with young people and stated that she would remain committed to it so that the borough remained a good place to grow up in. The Youth Parliament was a credit to the young people involved.

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

#### *Reduction in working Neighbourhood Fund*

The question from Councillor Gupta had asked about the lobbying efforts regarding the Government's proposal to remove £4M of Working Neighbourhood Fund money. He asked if it was not a stupid time to start slashing funds for jobs schemes such as those run within Brent, when they were proven to work, were genuinely local and had received recognition from far and wide.

Councillor Lorber replied that he too thought it was a stupid decision by a Government that did not appear to know what it was doing. Brent In2 Work was a successful project that provided a good service to the borough and was now threatened as the Government tried to take back £4M from Brent residents at a time of recession. He reiterated that strong representations had been made to the Government.

#### *Roadworks by utility companies*

The question by Councillor HB Patel had asked what fines had been levied on the utility companies over the last three months for their failure to adhere to timescales or required standards of work. He made reference to examples of unfinished work in his own ward and suggested the Council was failing to use the powers it had to take

action against the companies at great inconvenience to local residents. Councillor Patel felt the Council was being too liberal with utility companies who failed to complete their work within the given notice period and that urgent action was needed to prevent overstaying. As a supplementary question he asked what action the Council proposed to take to resolve the situation and why it was not made tougher rather than easier for the companies that overstay.

Councillor D Brown replied that the Council took its responsibilities very seriously in instances when utility companies left unfinished work. It had a much tougher stance on fining and would only allow extensions of time where there were very good reasons. He invited Councillor Patel to refer to him specific instances where works remained unfinished so that he could take them up directly.

#### *Wembley Academy – planning application*

The question asked by Councillor Mendoza had asked what the status of the planning application for the Wembley Academy was. He added that to persist in supporting the project when it was clearly the wrong site for many reasons was foolish. Councillor Mendoza asked as a supplementary question if, given the problems with the planning application, an alternative site should be found to avoid impairing the life of residents in the north of the borough and to meet the educational needs of those in the south.

Councillor Wharton replied by making reference to the report issued by the Greater London Authority which he argued was generally supportive and did not raise any issues that could not be adequately dealt with.

### **9. Items selected by Non-Executive Members**

#### *(i) Improvements to public sewers*

Councillor Joseph introduced the item she had raised which asked that the Council exert pressure on Thames Water to ensure the sewers serving the borough had an adequate capacity to cope with the increased rainfall more recently experienced.

A view was expressed that since the privatisation of Thames Water it had been a continual struggle to get them to meet their responsibilities towards updating London's old sewer system. The inconvenience caused when sewers collapsed was mentioned.

Councillor D Brown (Lead Member for Transport and Highways) acknowledged the seriousness of the item raised. He reported that he and officers had met with Thames Water to discuss how improvements could be made. He referred to a presentation on the renewal programme for London's Victorian water mains system to which some

members had indicated they would attend. With more properties being built and greater storms being experienced flooding was likely to become a more widespread problem and so it was important that the Council worked with Thames Water to address the situation.

*(ii) Waste transfer facility, Cricklewood – traffic impact*

Councillor Castle introduced the item he had raised which concerned the proposals for a waste transfer facility in Cricklewood. He stated that it was not known what the scale of the operation was likely to be, or what type of waste was involved, or the source of it and the effect of it travelling through the borough.

In accepting it was a cause of concern it was explained that some of the waste would come from Brent so it was of more importance to raise the issues of transport and the amount of waste involved, rather than where it came from. Reference was made to the Council's response to Barnet about the proposal which indicated that there were some concerns, especially around transport issues.

Councillor Van Colle (Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture) stated that the Council's response to the planning application did present objections on the transport issues. However, he pointed out that the scheme required a Private Finance Initiative to back it and he felt in the current economic climate it was unlikely this would materialise. He explained that the waste plant envisaged was similar to the one at Wembley Stadium which served Brent but at this stage it was not clear how much waste from Brent would go to any new facility in Cricklewood. Planning Committee would soon be considering the matter but it was an unknown timescale for the development given the present uncertain times. The matter would only come before the Executive if it needed to.

*(iii) Doorstep loans*

Councillor Green introduced the item he had raised concerning the current economic climate leading to many families resorting to using the services of doorstep loans. He referred to the public criticism of them and the extortionate rates imposed. The availability of such loans was often publicised by way of leaflets pushed through front doors which increased the likelihood of them being taken up by vulnerable people. Follow up action often then involved intimidation and violence. He hoped helpful financial advice could be provided, including contact details for Credit Unions, and that such businesses could be banned from Council and housing association property.

In supporting the item a view was expressed that it had to be recognised that people often did not have any alternative and that the promotion of credit unions needed to be made a priority. The impact this had on many residents across the borough was recognised and the loans taken out often left people worse off.

Councillor Blackman (Lead Member for Resources) acknowledged the widespread concern around this item. He stated that a considered response to this was required. Councillor Blackman referred to the tightening of credit and how interest rates charged by some credit card companies were increasing when interest rates were going down. Banks had been ineptly run and everyone was now suffering the consequences with an inadequate response from the Government. He agreed that further consideration needed to be given to the item, including looking again at the findings of a previous overview task group that had considered the matter.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the responses provided by the Lead Members on the two items above concerning public sewers and a waste transfer facility in Cricklewood indicating that the Executive accepted the importance of each item and would continue to give consideration to them as appropriate be noted and accepted;
- (ii) that the item concerning doorstep loans be further considered by the Executive, including having reference to a task group report submitted to the Executive in September 2005 on supporting access to financial services for excluded groups.

## 10. Report from the Executive

### ***a. Items reported by the Executive***

#### *(i) Meeting of Chief Executives of RSLs and Executive*

Councillor Lorber reported back from a useful meeting with the Chief Executives of registered social landlords (RSLs). He pointed out that the Council depended on the RSLs for the provision of houses as they owned twice the number in Brent than the Council did. The message from them was that the economic situation was having an impact but they were still keen to develop in the borough. It was more likely that they would look to develop smaller schemes and so appropriate sites would need to be made available. Councillor Lorber referred to other public authorities that owned empty land or properties and asked members to raise any they were aware of in their ward.

#### *(ii) New Children's Centres*

Councillor Lorber reported that the Council was in the process of opening more Children's Centres with a large one opening in Kingsbury High School and two opening in Cricklewood and Barham Libraries.

*(iii) New Neasden Library*

Councillor Lorber stated that he was keen to develop the library service and having invested in the Kingsbury Library plus, the Neasden Library would be re-opening in February following its modernisation. The Harlesden Library project had met with an unfortunate rise in costs but would continue as planned.

*(iv) Exam results*

Councillor Lorber referred to the excellent exam results announced by the Mayor and thanked the teachers, staff, governors, parents and pupils of the schools on producing the best ever results.

*(v) Economic situation*

Councillor Lorber stated that everyone was aware of the economic situation but he wanted to re-assure the Council's staff that their jobs would continue to be valued and the drive to continue to improve services would remain. He added that improving efficiency in everything the Council did was crucial to making progress.

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

Councillor Jones presented her report on the work of Overview and Scrutiny. She pointed out that Members had visited the Strathcona Day Centre and Aspects Day Centre. She had been glad to hear of the plans to improve both centres. She urged members to learn more about the work of Aspects which she had not been aware of. The Health Select Committee was due to meet at the Willesden Centre for Health and Care. Councillor Jones felt this would be a good opportunity to ask why Willesden had the lowest number of GPs per head of population. There was to be a further meeting of chairs of overview and scrutiny and a members' training session on questioning skills.

**10. Retirement of the Director of Human Resources and Diversity**

The Mayor referred to this being the last meeting at which the Director of Human Resources and Diversity, Val Jones, would be present before her retirement from the Council. He expressed appreciation for her work and wished her well for the future.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm

R FOX  
Mayor