



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

**Minutes of the ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
held on Monday, 25 January 2010 at 7.15 pm**

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor James O'Sullivan

The Deputy Mayor
Councillor Harbhajan Singh

COUNCILLORS:

Allie	Anwar
Baker	Bessong
Beswick	Blackman
D Brown	V Brown
Castle	Chavda
Colwill	Corcoran
Cummins	Detre
Dunn	Dunwell
Eniola	Farrell
Gupta	Hashmi
Hirani	Jackson
Joseph	Kansagra
Lorber	Malik
Matthews	Mendoza
Mistry	Pagnamenta
CJ Patel	HB Patel
HM Patel	Pervez
Ms Shaw	Sneddon
Steel	Wharton
Van Colle	

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from: Councillors Ahmed, Arnold, Mrs Bacchus, Butt, Coughlin, Crane, Mrs Fernandes, Fox, Green, John, Jones, Leaman, Long, J Moher, R Moher, Moloney, Motley, Powney, Thomas and Van Kalwala.

1. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the ordinary and special meetings held on 23 November 2009 be approved as an accurate record of the meetings.

2. **Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests**

None declared.

3. **Mayor's announcements**

The Mayor announced with sadness that in the early hours of 26 December 2009, former Councillor Bill Duffin passed away from pneumonia at Northwick Park Hospital after a short illness. He was 77 years old. Members of the Council spoke in tribute to Bill Duffin. As a mark of respect the Council stood for a minute's silence in his memory.

The Mayor stated that everybody had been shocked and moved by the tragic events in Haiti following the massive earthquake there two weeks ago. He spoke on behalf of all members of the Council in expressing profound sadness at the many tragic deaths and injuries. He encouraged everybody to respond generously to the emergency appeal that had been launched

The Mayor announced that this was the last Council meeting at which the Borough Solicitor, Terry Osborne, would be attending before she left on 29 January 2010 to take up her new senior role in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. On behalf of the Council, he thanked her for her hard-work and professional legal advice and offered best wishes for her exciting new role in East London.

The Mayor announced that unfortunately, Councillor Janice Long had suffered a bad fall in the snow recently and due to complications to her injuries she had undergone an operation. On behalf of the Council, he wished her all the very best for a full and speedy recovery.

The Mayor congratulated Councillor Pagnamenta and his wife Jessica on the birth of their son, Max, born on Boxing Day.

The Mayor thanked everyone who had attended his Charity Christmas Party in December, which had been a huge success and a very enjoyable evening.

The Mayor was pleased and proud to announce that Brent's entry in the New Year's Day Parade was awarded first prize. He referred to the trophy on display at the meeting and the £7,500 prize for his charity appeal. He especially thanked the volunteers who had taken part on the day.

The Mayor offered his congratulations to former Mayor Ahmad Shahzad, who had been awarded an OBE for services to black and minority ethnic communities in Britain.

The Mayor also offered his congratulations to former Councillor Phil Sealy who had been awarded an MBE for services to the community.

The Mayor also offered his congratulations to local resident Mary Turner who had been awarded an MBE for services to Trade Unions.

Finally, the Mayor referred to the list of current petitions showing progress on dealing with them which had been circulated around the chamber.

4. **Appointments to committees and outside bodies and appointment of chairs/vice chairs (if any)**

RESOLVED:

that the following appointments be made:

Councillor Pervez be appointed to the Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing Committee in place of Councillor Jackson,
Councillor Gupta be appointed to the Forward Plan Select Committee in place of Councillor Tancred,
Councillor Bessong be appointed as second alternate to Councillor Cummins on the Planning Committee.

5. **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.

In the absence of any member of the Labour Group to ask a supplementary question, the five questions selected by the Leader of the Labour Group could not be heard.

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

Concessionary fares scheme

The question from Councillor Anwar had asked if the Leader agreed with the all-party motion from London Councils which deplored the Government's plan to halve its contribution towards the cost of extending the scheme. Councillor Anwar asked why councils should get the blame for the huge cost of the scheme and for rising council taxes when the Government was depriving London of the money needed to implement their free bus policy. He felt it was cynical of the Government to say they were supporting older people but then withdraw the money to do this. As a supplementary question, Councillor Anwar asked what other grants the Government were removing that would leave Brent Council either having to charge more in Council Tax or reduce services.

Councillor Lorber (Leader) replied that he agreed with the sentiments expressed by Councillor Anwar. He stated that while the Council worked to defend the services it

provided the Government was undermining this by imposing cuts in funding. He gave as examples of this the £4M over 4 years for the Freedom Pass, many millions of pounds transferred from the health service and £4M lost towards schemes for the unemployed.

Salt supplies

The question from Councillor Pervez had asked how the Council had been affected by the Government's decision to centrally co-ordinate all salt supplies. Councillor Pervez felt that it was a sorry state of affairs when well run Councils such as Brent organised themselves well in advance in preparation for the bad weather and then had their grit supplies taken from them. As a supplementary question, Councillor Pervez asked why the Council's supplies had been redirected to other areas and was it not hypocritical of Councillor John and Dawn Butler, MP to comment on the gritting problem when it was their government that had taken Brent's grit.

Councillor D Brown (Lead Member for Highways and Transportation) replied that between 16 December and 8 January the Council laid down more grit than it had ever done so before, with 1,517 tonnes of salt used to keep the traffic running on the main highways. The Council had prepared for this by increasing its grit stock. Nevertheless the resources had to be concentrated on the main routes through the borough. Councillor Brown contrasted the service provided with that of past years when the borough had not been so well prepared for bad weather.

Funding for Brent schools

Councillor Leaman's question had asked if the cheque for £80 million held by Dawn Butler, MP in a recent picture had yet been paid into the Council. In the absence of Councillor Leaman, Councillor Bessong added that it was suspected that the £80M cheque being held by Dawn Butler, MP was not from the Labour Party and had not been sent to Brent Council. As a supplementary question, Councillor Bessong asked when was it likely that Brent's schools would see the money and was there any danger the programme would be halted in the same way as the colleges programme was starved of cash.

In reply, Councillor Wharton (Lead Member for Children and Families) explained that it was not expected that building work would begin for 18 to 24 months, all being well. He felt there was a danger that the Council would incur costs on project management only for the money not to be forthcoming given the economic uncertainty but he hoped this would not be the case. The Government had been expected to make an announcement on 15 November about the award of funding under the Building Schools for the Future programme. This was important for the Council because interviews were taking place for the senior post which would be responsible for the programme and the announcement would have confirmed that there was a job to be done. In the event there was an unexplained change in arrangements and the announcement was delayed until 30 November. In the meantime Dawn Butler, MP appeared in the press holding a giant cheque. Councillor Wharton stated that this was another example of some people playing politics while the Council was trying to get on with delivering services.

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

Cremation facilities in the borough

The question from Councillor Mistry had asked if there were any plans to open a crematorium in the borough especially given the large local Hindu population. She asked as a supplementary question if the Council could explore the possibility of finding a suitable site with sufficient car parking and build a facility (not a temple) large enough to accommodate 200-300 people to enable Brent residents to pay their last respects, perform their rituals in relative calm in the knowledge that they did not have to worry about space, parking pressures on neighbours and such like.

Councilor Van Colle (Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture) replied that now he better understood what Councillor Mistry was asking for, he felt the provision of such a facility could be explored in consultation with the Hindu community. He added that it would obviously have to meet planning requirements and would not be easy to achieve but he felt it was something that Council officers could look into.

Grit and salt supplies

The question from Councillor Kansagra had asked what the current levels of salt and grit supplies held by the Council were and if any supplies had been diverted by instruction from the Government. He added that it was clear that the Council had been very prudent in ordering extra supplies only for them to then be taken away. Whilst recognising the need to keep the main roads clear he felt that there were other significant roads that were not gritted such as in Barnhill which was one of the highest areas in London. Barnhill has some very steep roads for which brakes are needed even on normal days and he asked as a supplementary question if the Council had a priority list of roads for gritting once the main roads had been treated.

Councillor D Brown (Lead Member for Highways and Transportation) replied that there was already such a list held by the Council and this could be viewed on the Council's web site. He suggested it was also open to councillors to choose to spend some of their ward money on the provision of grit bins. Councillor Brown stated that if the Council had been able to retain full control of its salt and grit stocks it could have done a lot more. However, as previously explained at the meeting, the Government had redirected some supplies and the Council was now left with only 3 to 4 days supply. As a result of the Government's actions, Councils did not have the level of supplies recommended by the Government. Councillor Brown stated that the Government's actions had been very wrong when the Council had tried hard to provide the best service it could to make the borough a cleaner, greener, safer place.

6. Items selected by non-executive members

(i) Rent rises

Councillor Castle introduced his item by adding that he felt the policy of the Government on housing rents was aimed at hitting the working class. He explained that at a national level a rise of 3.6% was the outcome of government policy. In Brent it had been decided that rents would rise by only 1% for which he

congratulated the Administration. He urged that lobbying continue to try to avoid the worst effects of the Government's rent policy.

Members were reminded that last year the Government had tried to inflict an increase of 3 times the rate of inflation before it made a U turn in the face of opposition. It was stated that in effect the Council was no longer free to set rent levels as the Government forced levels to rise according to its own policy, which amounted to an attack on the less fortunate in the borough. It was submitted that the Council's joint Administration had worked well to minimise the impact of rent rises and the effect of any rise was the responsibility of the Government.

Councillor Lorber referred to an earlier question to which he had replied by outlining some of the areas of expenditure pushed on to the Council by Government actions and he stated this was another such example where the cut to the Housing Revenue Account had cost the Council £1.5M. He explained that the Government's rent convergence policy had originally been planned to end in 2024 but this had been brought forward by 10 years and so implementation was being speeded up. The Council's housing service was doing all it could to minimise the impact but this had implications for the HRA in future years. This amounted to a direct attack on Council tenants and he urged all parties to send a message to the Government that they were opposed to its actions on rents.

(ii) Preston Road car parking

Councillor Mendoza introduced his item by referring to the car park at Wembley Park operated by London Underground and the car park at Preston Road operated by the Council. The former was well used and the latter was not because of the excessive charge levied by the Council. He urged the Executive to review the charges so that it encouraged greater use of the car park and thereby generated additional income to the Council.

It was suggested that a decision had already been taken on this matter after it had been drawn to the attention of the Leader and the Highways Committee by local residents. It was confirmed that the Executive was already considering the issue and Councillor D Brown noted the point made by Councillor Mendoza.

RESOLVED:

that the response by the Executive that it would be further considering the two items raised be accepted.

7. Reports from:

7.1 the Executive

(i) Road gritting

Councillor Lorber referred to the earlier questions on this subject and to the debate that was to take place later in the meeting. In the meantime he reminded councillors that under the Highways Act the Council was forced to carry out Government instructions on the clearing of main roads and thoroughfares.

(ii) Copland Community and Technical College

Councillor Lorber thanked the interim board of governors, teachers, staff and parents for ensuring that the college continued to run well. Within the Council's successful bid for BSF was included provision for Copland College and he looked forward to the future redevelopment of the school.

(iii) St Raphael's housing

Councillor Lorber announced the award of £2M for new homes on the St Raphael's housing estate. This had turned out to be another example of the Government breaking the embargo placed on the announcement and claiming the credit when in reality it was the Council that had attracted the funding

(iv) South Kilburn redevelopment

Councillor Detre reported on the progress made in South Kilburn. He felt more progress had been made in the last two years than the previous nine years. New homes were to be provided and the new sports centre was almost completed. It was anticipated that in spring construction would start on building 153 new homes of which 113 would be for social housing and all built to a high specification. A further 133 new homes were being planned, again to a high specification. Gordon House had been demolished, the Texaco site was due for redevelopment and the Albert Road day centre was to be relocated.

(v) GCSE results

Councillor Wharton reported on the recently published league tables which showed that Brent schools had continued to improve and remained well ahead of the national average and the London average. Brent was in the top 20% of local authorities in the country despite being one of the most deprived authorities in the country. Councillor Wharton stated that this reflected very well on the schools within the borough.

7.2 Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

In the absence of Councillor Jones her report was received as submitted.

8. Motions selected by the Group Leaders

In accordance with the procedural motion agree earlier in the meeting the motions submitted by the Leaders of the Labour Group and Conservative Group were taken together.

8.1 Motion selected by the Leader of the Labour Group

Council response to adverse weather

8.2 Motion selected by the Leader of the Conservative Group

Severe weather

Councillor Blackman moved the motion in his name by referring to the recent bad weather as the worst for 30 years. He paid tribute to Council officers and the Council's contractors who had done a brilliant job in keeping the borough running during the bad weather and to the staff of the Communications Team who had kept councillors and local residents informed about the conditions in the borough and to the schools which had to cope with difficult circumstances but managed to make arrangements with parents and pupils. Councillor Blackman stated that following the bad weather in February 2009 the Government had investigated the readiness of Councils to deal with future such conditions. However no action had been taken on this until 15 December 2009 when the snow started to fall. In the meantime, the Council had ordered in extra supplies of grit and salt but a lot of this had been diverted by the Government into areas deemed to have greater priority and where inadequate provision had been made. This caused immense disruption in the borough and Councillor Blackman submitted that the blame for this rested with the Government and that the Council deserved credit for dealing with the conditions as well as it did.

In the absence of any Labour councillors to move the motion submitted by Councillor John it was not taken.

RESOLVED:

that this Council notes that contingency plans were presented to Government in August 2009 for arrangements to be made in the event of severe weather. However, these plans were not enacted until the 15 December 2009 and even then only partial guidance was given to local authorities.

This Council further notes that officers took steps to order extra quantities of grit and salt in December.

This Council congratulates the officers and contractors for their efforts to ensure that the major routes were gritted and kept clear in the recent snow and ice.

This Council condemns the failure of the Labour Government to ensure that proper guidance was given to local authorities on contingency arrangements until the snow fell.

9. **Motion selected by the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group**

Strangers into citizens

Councillor Allie moved the motion in Councillor Lorber's name which sought support for the principles of the Strangers into Citizens campaign. He submitted that the motion offered the opportunity for all members to support a noble cause. Councillor Allie asked if it was fair for 600,000 people to be living in the country but for them to not officially exist. He called for the naturalisation of long term migrants living in the country and pointed to the backing the campaign had attracted.

In opposition to the motion it was submitted that it could not be right to reward unlawfulness. The point was made that if people entered the country unlawfully it was wrong to suggest that this was acceptable as long as they remained undetected for 5 years. If the immigration authorities decided that someone should

be deported they should then be deported quickly. If they were working illegally they were probably not paying taxes and therefore not contributing to the economy. Whilst recognising the position some people found themselves in it was stated that it did not change the fact that they entered the UK illegally. Reference was made to the many people who went through the correct legal procedures to enter the country and how this would be viewed by them.

In support of the motion, Councillor Lorber pointed out that the campaign was designed to support a one-off action in order to deal with the situation left by the government of the day losing control of the passage of immigrants during the 1980's. The reality was that these people existed in the country and were treated as an underclass and it was asked if they should be dealt with in a civilised manner or as criminals.

RESOLVED:

that this Council:

- a) recognises the need to tighten UK borders;
- b) notes the Greater London Authority and London School of Economic's assessment that 618,000 irregular migrants currently live and work in Britain, of whom 500,000 live in London;
- c) acknowledges the contribution of irregular migrants to the national economy and to diverse local communities;
- d) notes that more than 69% of Brent's residents were born outside the UK;
- e) estimates that up to 20,000 irregular migrants are long-term residents of the borough of Brent;
- f) regrets that irregular migrants are not accounted for in the allocation of funding to local authorities;
- g) supports Citizens:UK's 'Strangers into Citizens' campaign for the one-off regularisation of long term migrants;
- h) notes the support of other local authorities for this campaign;
- i) encourages more local authorities to support the principles of the Strangers into Citizens campaign and urges the Government to adopt the Strangers into Citizens proposal for a 'pathway to citizenship': a work permit for migrants who have lived in the UK for more than a set period of time, following which they are granted 'Indefinite Leave to Remain' subject to an English test and positive references from an employer or person of standing in the community.

10. **Urgent business**

There was none.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm

COUNCILLOR JAMES O'SULLIVAN
Mayor