

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

Minutes of the ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL held on Monday, 12th October, 2009 at 7.15 pm

PRESENT:

The Worshipful the Mayor
Councillor James O'Sullivan

COUNCILLORS:

Allie	Arnold
Mrs Bacchus	Baker
Bessong	Beswick
Blackman	Brown
V Brown	Butt
Castle	Colwill
Corcoran	Cummins
Detre	Dunn
Dunwell	Eniola
Mrs Fernandes	Fox
Green	Gupta
Hashmi	Hirani
Jackson	John
Jones	Joseph
Kansagra	Lorber
Malik	Mistry
J Moher	R Moher
Moloney	Motley
Pagnamenta	CJ Patel
HB Patel	HM Patel
Pervez	Powney
Ms Shaw	Sneddon
Steel	Tancred
Thomas	Van Colle
Van Kalwala	Wharton

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from: Councillors Singh, Anwar, Chavda, Clues, Coughlin, Crane, Farrell, Leaman, Long and Mendoza

1. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 September 2009 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

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

None declared.

3. **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor announced that the Council had won a Corporate Social Responsibility award for the work that went into the Brent Respect Festival 2009. He congratulated the communications team and the festivals team in Environment & Culture in particular, for all the hard work that went into making the environmental theme at the Respect Festival such a success.

The Mayor reminded Members that the Brent to Richmond sponsored walk was taking place on Sunday 18 October and asked that those not able to join the walk support the walkers by sponsoring them. All money raised would go to the Paul Daisely Trust and the Mayor's Charity Appeal.

In accordance with Standing Orders the Mayor drew attention to the list of current petitions showing progress on dealing with them, circulated around the chamber.

4. **Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies and Appointment of Chairs/Vice Chairs (if any)**

RESOLVED:

that the following changes be made:

Body

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Children and Families Overview
and Scrutiny Committee

Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing
Committee

Planning Committee

Appointment

Councillor Eniola to replace
Councillor Joseph as 1st alternate to
Councillor H B Patel

Councillor Beswick to replace
Councillor Eniola

Councillor Butt as 1st alternate
in place of Councillor Beswick

Remove Councillor Butt as 2nd
alternate and leave as vacant

Remove Councillor Eniola as
2nd alternate to Councillor Farrell
and leave as vacant

Councillor Beswick to replace
Councillor Eniola as 1st

alternate to Councilor Powney

	Remove Councillor Beswick as 2 nd alternate to Councillor Powney and leave as vacant Councillor Eniola to replace Councillor Mendoza as 1 st Alternate to Councillor Baker
Forward Plan Select Committee	Remove Councillor Eniola as 2 nd alternate to Councillor Long and leave as vacant
Health Select Committee	Remove Councillor Eniola as 2 nd alternate to Councillor Moloney and leave as vacant

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.

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

Dedicated Schools Grant

The question from Councillor Arnold had asked what the percentage increase in the Dedicated Schools Budget for Brent schools had been in each year since 2006/7 and how this compared with other local authorities. Councillor Arnold referred to the answer she had received which she stated confirmed the exceptionally high investment that had gone into schools and congratulated the schools on their efforts to raise standards and attainment each year. She added that the expectation now was for careful resourcing and planning in the provision of education throughout the borough to ensure an even distribution. However, she felt there was no clear plan in place and the promised new primary schools in Stonebridge and Kilburn had not materialised. As a supplementary question, Councillor Arnold asked what resources were being invested in the underperforming Schools Places Strategy Team so that it was fit to achieve necessary analysis and forward planning to keep headteachers and ECM (Every Child Matters) stakeholders involved and to make sure there was a modern school place for every child in the borough.

Councillor Wharton (Lead Member for Children and Families) expressed confusion over the question. He stated that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was to meet the existing costs of providing education and although this had been increased there was included in this a degree of catch up with other London boroughs. With the rising primary school age population it was forecast that there needed to be an extra 11 forms of entry amounting to £40-50M cost which could not be drawn from the DSG. The current allocation of resources by the Government came nowhere near to the level of investment needed to deal with the rising primary school population and many other boroughs faced a similar problem.

Staff redundancy

The question from Councillor Fox had asked how many members of staff had been made redundant or had been informed that they were to be made redundant over the past three months. He felt that the answer he had received did not include reference to the responsibility the Executive was taking on this matter. As a supplementary question he asked what approvals, comments or instructions had come from the Executive regarding the very serious and council wide programme of cuts and redundancies and when councillors and the public would be able to read the very expensive Pricewaterhouse Coopers report on the council.

Councillor Sneddon (Lead Member for Human Resources & Diversity and Local Democracy & Consultation) responded by making clear that his answer did answer the question. He stated that the Executive was taking responsibility for transforming the way the council worked through the improvement and efficiency agenda to ensure Council Tax paying residents received a better service. He submitted that it was not for the Executive to issue instructions on individual staffing issues but it was its responsibility to lead the strategic direction of the Council.

Job losses

The question from Councillor John had asked if the impending loss of 300 jobs in the Council meant that the council had been grossly inefficient since 2006. Referring to the answer she had received, Councillor John pointed out that question time provided the opportunity for backbench members to ask questions of the Executive, not the other way round. She submitted that the Chief Executive's September newsletter showed that the performance of the council had declined and as a supplementary question asked under whose watch had such a massive deterioration occurred.

Council Lorber (Leader) replied that the current Administration would be judged by the people of the borough at election time. Since 2006 there had been four by elections of which the Liberal Democrats had won three with the Labour Party not gaining one seat. In 2005 the Council conducted a residents' satisfaction survey which showed a satisfaction rate of 48%. This year a similar survey had shown the rate increasing to 65%.

London Low Emission Zone

The question from Councillor Powney had asked what action would be taken to reduce emissions within Brent's most polluted areas. In referring to the answer he had received he asked if it represented the views of both parties in the Administration or just the Lead Member's. Councillor Powney referred to proposals to demolish a number of properties along the North Circular Road because of the pollution suffered by the people currently living in them. Again referring to the answer he had received, Councillor Powney wondered how a Brent Local Emissions Zone could be rejected if the benefits and disadvantages had not been assessed. As a supplementary question, Councillor Powney asked if the Administration would commit to assessing the benefits and disadvantages of a Brent-specific Low Emissions Zone before making a final decision and when such an assessment would be completed.

Councillor Van Colle (Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture) confirmed that in answering the question he did so on behalf of the Executive. He

stated that it first had to be recognised that Brent was positioned in the middle of other boroughs with high pollution rates and so any local initiative would be affected by this. Although the proposal could be looked into the Council could not commit to any growth proposals at the present time because of the tight financial situation brought about by the actions of the present Government. He stated that if resources were made available then it would be considered.

Future of the ALMO

The question from Councillor Thomas had asked if consideration was being given to bringing the ALMO back in-house. As a supplementary question he asked if, given the present management agreement would run out in 2012 and with long term viability in mind, would it be possible to extend the management agreement with possible break clauses. Brent Housing Partnership had now acquired GNH (Grenville New Homes) with a 30 year business plan making it the only ALMO tied into long term financial arrangements such as this. He felt such an extension would send the right indications to potential backers.

Councillor Allie (Lead Member for Housing and Customer Services) replied to the supplementary question by saying no.

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

Outcome of Residents' Attitude Survey

The question from Councillor Castle has asked if the results of the recent Residents' Attitude Survey vindicated the Administration's approach to value for money. He asked as a supplementary question if a much greater satisfaction with basic Council services, delivered in a value for money way was what residents valued most. He also asked for assurance that the Leadership would not waiver from seeking greater efficiency gains, if these resulted in smarter working and more money to protect and improve frontline services.

Councillor Lorber (Leader) replied that the results of the survey were a clear indication of the loss of support for the Labour Party and the views of the residents of Brent showed they supported cleaner streets and better services.

Proposals for a third pool

The question from Councillor V Brown had asked for an update on proposals for a third pool in Brent. As a supplementary question Councillor Brown asked for an assurance that, in line with making sports more available as part of keeping in good health, the Administration would pay close attention to value for money so that residents would not be priced out of any facility.

Councillor Van Colle (Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture) replied that the Council was doing something the previous Administration had failed to do by planning to add an additional pool to the services provided in the borough. By identifying a site in Roe Green Park the Council was ready to respond as soon as financial support was identified. No commitment could be given on a charging structure at the present time but Councillor Van Colle stated that the Council would

make sure it was built to value for money standards and in a way that most residents would be able to afford.

Street based cleaning

The question from Councillor Green had asked how extra investment in street based cleaning had continued to benefit the residents of Brent. As a supplementary question, Councillor Green asked what exciting initiatives there were in maintaining the Council's robust commitment to continuing to clean streets and recycle throughout the present troubling times.

Councillor D Brown (Lead Member for Transport and Highways) remembered when rubbish littered the borough. He stated that recycling was up by 50% and was proud to report that an independent scoring on street cleaning had put it at 16% against a target of 19%. This was a massive improvement and added to this was the introduction of Green Zones.

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

Installation of road humps

The question from Councillor Mendoza had asked for confirmation of the process for the physical installation of road humps in the borough. In his absence, Councillor H B Patel added that in many cases the installation of traffic calming measures was a waste of money and referred to the scheme he had raised at an earlier Council meeting which had subsequently been changed. On behalf of Councillor Mendoza he asked as a supplementary question why following the installation of road humps they were not properly marked making them difficult to see. He asked for confirmation that in future the marking of road humps would be included as part of the scheme and given priority.

Councillor D Brown (Lead Member for Transport and Highways) stated that the scheme referred to by Councillor Patel had been modified in light of comments received. As for the marking of road humps, he replied that he would ask officers to look into this matter. However, he added that it was not necessary to wait to ask a Council question before raising such a matter. Councillor Brown also stated that if drivers drove sensibly as they should always do they would avoid accidents.

Closure of Stag Lane Doctors' practice

The question from Councillor Mistry had asked why residents were being forced to travel to Monks Park or Wembley following the closure of the Stag Lane Doctors practice for urgent repairs. She added that despite being told that Brent PCT were in discussions with the GPs the only dialogue had been a telephone call on 1st October saying they were closing the premises. Councillor Mistry expressed concern that this signalled the approach of more drastic cuts being made by NHS Brent. There did not appear any intention to consult local residents many of whom were patients at Stag Lane medical centre and she understood the Chief Executive of NHS Brent had no contact with the Director of Housing and Community Care on the subject. She asked as her supplementary question for assurances that the Stag Lane medical facilities would not be moved out of the Queensbury area to far

away places such as Monks Park and Wembley, that residents would be consulted and that the views of the local GPs and the Stag Lane practice would be taken into account.

Councillor Colwill (Lead Member for Adults, Health and Social Care) replied that the Council and the PCT worked in partnership and as such the PCT should keep ward councillors informed of what was happening in their area. He stated that in this case efforts were being made to try to keep some medical facilities in the local area.

6. **Items Selected by Non-Executive Members**

(i) Thames Water

Councillor Shaw introduced her item by pointing out that at times of heavy rain residents complained of sewage flooding their basements. This caused damage to property and was detrimental to their health. Thames Water had said that the drainage system was adequate but it clearly was not. She urged the Executive to take this matter up.

Councillor D Brown (Lead Member for Transport and Highways) responded by agreeing to take the matter up. He accepted that residents suffered difficulties with flooding but reported that Thames Water did not consider the area a priority for replacement of the drainage system. He undertook to raise the matter again at future meetings with Thames Water. Councillor Brown added that the Council had no powers of enforcement in this matter and so it was important that all incidents were reported so that lobbying for the works to be undertaken could be strengthened.

(ii) Mains water replacement programme

Councillor Joseph introduced her item by stating that Thames Water was not the only company that dug up the roads but that in this case one whole side of the roads had been dug up which meant that those residents with parking permits had lost two months use of them. Councillor Joseph felt that many of the companies who were responsible for road works took too long to complete them and had a lack of regard to the inconvenience caused to residents. She felt there should be a system of compensation and asked the Executive to look into this.

Councillor D Brown (Lead Member for Transport and Highways) explained that Thames Water was undertaking a programme of mains water replacement in parts of the borough. He agreed to look into the points made by Councillor Joseph and find out what the experience of other councils was. In the meantime he suggested residents should contact the Parking Shop about loss of use of their permits.

RESOLVED:-

that the response provided by the Lead Member on each item be noted.

7. **Reports from:**

7.1 **the Executive**

(i) *Improvement and Efficiency Action Plan*

Councillor Lorber referred to recent Government announcements of planned cuts in public expenditure and the selling of public assets. It was clear what the future held and the Council intended to be prepared to face it. He added that one year ago the Council produced an Improvement and Efficiency Strategy setting out how the Council would improve services and an action plan had now been developed to continue with the Council's aim of providing excellent services. It was available on the internet and Councillor Lorber urged Members to read it.

(ii) *Residents' Attitude Survey*

Councillor Lorber referred to the recent survey carried out in the borough which showed that 83% of residents were satisfied with the area they lived in which he felt reflected the actions taken by the Council. Other figures showed 65% of residents were satisfied with the way the Council was running its services and around half felt a strong sense of community in the place they lived. Satisfaction rates were also up on environment related issues. Councillor Lorber felt this was an excellent verdict on the performance of the Council.

7.2 Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Jones reported that only three meetings of the select committees had taken place since the last report. The Forward Plan Select Committee had met to consider the decisions called-in on the West London Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy and on the Modernisation of the Council's Financial Management Arrangements and Approval for Appointment of Consultants. Following discussion on these two items no alternative views had been sent back to the Executive. The Select Committee had also received briefings on the Future of Brent in2work and Proposed Joint Employment Venture and on the Civic Centre.

The Budget Panel had heard from the Director of Policy and Regeneration on the local effects of the recession. It was clear that the impact of the recession had been significant particularly on the most deprived wards. There was an increase in the take up of benefits and unemployment. Mental illness had increased and there was more acquisitive burglary. The panel had also been updated on the Housing Revenue Account and reviewed previous budgets.

The Performance and Finance Select Committee had considered a number of items including the performance of the Revenues Service, the 4th quarter review of performance and finance in 2008/09 and had heard about the new evidence base which was a new tool that brought all the information on the borough held by the Council into a single accessible point.

8. Motions selected by the Group Leaders

8.1 Motion selected by the Leader of the Labour Group

Proposals to enhance local democracy

Councillor John moved the motion in her name which put forward ways to enhance local democracy. Councillor John submitted that there was cross party agreement

that the provisions in the Local Government Act 2000 did not work well for non-executive members and the scrutiny function. She felt that if meetings of the Council were televised it would lead to improved behaviour by Members. She felt there should be a right for Members to be able to ask questions at meetings of the Executive and that each ward should have its own forum. The motion made other proposals that she felt could be introduced at minimal cost.

The view was submitted that there existed a democratic deficit and as an example of this it was recounted that the Council had approved its budget in March, only for the Chief Executive to issue a newsletter in May stating that the council would need to save £50M over the next four years. This was noted at the July Council meeting with no other discussion of the issue. However, it was pointed out that the government of the day had changed the law in a deliberate act to abolish the committee style of governance. As for holding meetings at other venues it was pointed out that this had been tried before and resulted in public disturbances. Another view was submitted that proposals such as those put forward needed more detailed discussions which should be undertaken by a small Member-level group.

Councillor Lorber moved an amendment to the motion, accepting a suggestion that reference to 'all party' should read 'all-party/group'. He stated that whilst he understood the frustrations expressed, it was a matter of fact that the legislation invested power in the Executive and this position needed to be accepted. He agreed that improvements could be made but the motion before Council was not the way to achieve these.

A further view expressed support for the ideas put forward by the motion by pointing out that the council already televised marriage ceremonies and it was a logical step to extend this to citizenship ceremonies. Holding meetings at external venues was a positive suggestion and it was felt the current response provided by Lead Members to issues raised at Council meetings was not sufficient. The cost of some of the proposals was raised, such as televising proceedings, both to the Council and to residents who would have to pay a subscription charge. It was not felt likely there would be a high take up. It was submitted that once the committee system was abolished it rendered Council meetings virtually useless. The suggestion to hold meetings in other parts of the borough could be implemented without the need for a Council decision and reference was made to the Children and Families Committee having done this. It was submitted that people were not well informed on how government, including local government worked. Whilst some of the proposals included in the motion were supported in principle others were not and in any case it was felt the whole issue needed further discussion.

The amendment moved by Councillor Lorber was put to the vote and declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED:

This Council notes that membership of political parties and voter turnout in elections is at an all time low; the turnout in the last two general elections being the lowest since 1918.

This Council agrees with Baroness Helena Kennedy, QC that the public perception is that 'political institutions and politicians are failing, untrustworthy and disconnected from the great mass of the British people'.

This Council recognises that much of the public's reduced trust has come about as a result of things such as the MPs' scandal and their disgust at expenses issues such as the claiming of huge Second Home Allowances by MPs who already have homes in London. Nevertheless this Council recognises that this is a problem for local authorities as well as for central government and there are number of ways in which local authorities can enhance democratic renewal and take action both to involve local people more fully and to reduce the democratic deficit.

This Council welcomes ideas from across the political spectrum to enhance local democracy. This Council notes that across the country many local authorities are reviewing the way in which local democracy is debated and the way in which local residents are engaged.

To further enhance local democracy, this Council resolves to set up an all party/group scrutiny task group to investigate how local democracy can be improved, with a view to increasing the debate at Full Council meetings, improving the public's access to local democracy and encouraging more young people to take part.

8.2 Motion selected by the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group

Local Housing Allowance

Councillor Allie moved the motion in Councillor Blackman's name which called on the Council to oppose the Government's proposal to remove the local housing allowance. He stated that this amounted to an attack on the poorest members of the community.

It was submitted that the current legislation had not been successful in introducing more competition into the setting of private sector rents and that a large number of properties were not picked up by the scheme. Another view was put that things had changed since the legislation was introduced and it was right that the government reviewed such areas of spending. Many people were not able to benefit from the allowance and it was felt that such a motion would harm the reputation of the Council.

RESOLVED:

This Council notes that at present 300,000 people in the UK on low incomes are allowed to keep up to £780 a year of their housing allowance if they find accommodation that costs less than the maximum benefit. This Council also notes that this reform was introduced to give tenants greater control over their housing arrangements by paying the rent themselves and the option to trade quality for extra money.

This Council notes however that under proposals which will be implemented next April by the Labour Government, this system will be scrapped, a decision which could cost many of Brent's poorest residents up to 20% of their income or up to £15

per week. This Council notes with concern that the removal of competition means that landlords will raise rents to the allowance maximum making it yet more difficult for our poorest residents.

This Council condemns the Labour Government for once again abandoning the people who need help the most and resolves to write to Brent's MPs encouraging them to oppose these proposals.

8.3 Motion selected by the Leader of the Conservative Group

Disruption to key public sector services

Councillor Blackman moved the motion in his name referring to the disruption in the country caused by industrial dispute and the deteriorating popularity of the Government. He added that there was no excuse for such strike action or for the macho-management styles adopted and instead round table discussions should be used to settle the disputes. He pointed out that in contrast the Council was planning for the future in discussion with its staff.

Councillor Sneddon moved an amendment to the motion which sought to acknowledge the need for modernisation of working practices and that this needed the support of the workforce.

A view was put that it was not the trade unions that posed a threat but other arms of government. Reference was made to the threat to pensions, the imposition of charging that impacted greatest on the poorest, cuts proposed by the Mayor of London and the threat of redundancy that the Council's staff faced.

The amendment to the motion moved by Councillor Sneddon was put to the vote and declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED:

This Council notes the proposed strike by members of the RMT on the Victoria Line on 5 October and threats for further strikes on the London Underground. This Council also notes the result of the ballot for the proposed strike by postal workers.

This Council believes that in the twenty-first century every organisation must constantly modernise its working practices to improve performance and efficiency.

This Council also believes that successful change programmes are those that command the support of the workforce.

Accordingly the Council calls on both management and unions of the organisations concerned to recognise these two truths and work together to improve services and avoid causing suffering to Brent residents.

9. Urgent Business

None.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm

COUNCILLOR JAMES O'SULLIVAN
Mayor