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## LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

Minutes of the ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL  
held on Thursday 20 April 2017 at 7.00 pm

### PRESENT:

**The Worshipful the Mayor**  
Councillor Parvez Ahmed

**The Deputy Mayor**  
Councillor Bhagwanji Chohan

### COUNCILLORS:

Aden	Agha
Allie	Bradley
Butt	Carr
S Choudhary	Colacicco
Collier	Colwill
Conneely	Crane
Daly	Davidson
Dixon	Eniola
Ezeajughi	Farah
Harrison	Hector
Hirani	Hossain
Jones	Kabir
Kansagra	Kelcher
Long	Mahmood
Mashari	Maurice
McLeish	McLennan
Miller	Moher
J Mitchell Murray	W Mitchell Murray
Naheerathan	M Patel
RS Patel	Perrin
Pitruzzella	Shahzad
Ketan Sheth	Krupa Sheth
Southwood	Stopp
Tatler	Van Kalwala

#### 1. **Apologies for Absence**

The Mayor stated that direct apologies for absence had been received from: Councillors Chan, A Choudry, Denselow, Duffy, Hoda-Benn, Marquis, Nerva, Pavey and Thomas.

## 2. **Declarations of Interest**

- (i) Councillor Harrison declared a personal interest in respect of Agenda Item No.6 (Housing Management Options Review – Outcome of Formal Consultation) in that she was a current member of the Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) Member and Resident Panel Board.
- (ii) Councillor Collier declared, in respect of Agenda Item No.6 (Housing Management Options Review – Outcome of Formal Consultation), that he had previously been a member of the BHP Member and Resident Panel Board, but had informed the Chair of his resignation on 3 January 2017.

*Councillors Colwill, Davidson, Kansagra, Maurice and Mashari joined the meeting at 7.03pm.*

## 3. **Mayor's Announcements (including any petitions received)**

The Mayor made the following announcements:

### ***(i) Service of Hope and Reconciliation following the Westminster terror attack***

The Mayor reflected that everyone was shocked and saddened by the terrorist attack on Westminster on 22 March. He informed Full Council that on 5 April 2017 he had represented Brent at the Service of Hope and Reconciliation which followed the attack. He said that it was a humbling and moving event which had showed the solidarity and resilience of the people of London. The occasion had made him feel extremely proud at the defiance shown in the face of adversity. He continued that thoughts were with everyone who had been involved in the attack and that the Brent Civic Centre flag had been flown at half-mast to show solidarity and unity with those affected.

*A minutes silence then proceeded to take place in the Council Chamber.*

### ***(ii) March Fundraising Event at the Grand Hall***

The Mayor announced that on 16 March he had hosted another successful fundraising evening in the Council's Grand Hall. He thanked all of those who attended and those who had supported him during his mayoral year.

### ***(iii) Wembley National Stadium Trust Reception***

The Mayor stated that he had been delighted to attend the Wembley National Stadium Trust Reception recently. The reception had celebrated the work that local organisations had been doing to engage local residents in sport and physical recreation activities. He said that it had been a pleasure to meet such a wide cross-section of Brent residents.

### ***(iv) Romanian Ambassador for London at the Civic Centre***

The Mayor announced that on 19 April 2017 he, alongside the Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council and Council's Chief Executive, had had the

pleasure of welcoming His Excellency, Dan Mihalache, the Romanian Ambassador for London to the Civic Centre. He noted that it had been interesting to discuss the integration process of the large Romanian community Brent and the different ways to work together.

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

It was **RESOLVED that**, the following appointments to Committees be ratified by Full Council:

- (i) Resignation of Councillor Mili Patel, as full Member, from the Council's Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee – Councillor Roxanne Mashari to fill the vacancy, as full Member.
- (ii) Resignation of Siddika Gulamhusen, as non-statutory co-opted Member, from the Council's Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee – Sayed Jaffar Milani (Al-Khoei Foundation) to fill the vacancy, as non-statutory co-opted Member.

#### 5. **Deputations (if any)**

The Mayor noted that the Council had received a combined deputation from residents of Harlesden Gardens in Kensal Green Ward and that the deputation related to traffic issues and road rage. He asked Councillor Kelcher (Kensal Green Ward) to introduce the residents.

Councillor Kelcher began by placing on record his thanks to the Mayor for all his work during his mayoral year. He stated that the residents would speak on the issue in further detail but mentioned that he, Councillor McLeish and Councillor Hector had all visited the roads in question and that they were fully supportive of the initiative being proposed by residents. It was felt that this would help to aid the traffic problems which were prevalent in Harlesden.

Nancy Strang (resident of Harlesden Gardens) began by stating that she had been a resident of the Harlesden Gardens area for 14 years. She outlined that in the last couple of years the traffic on Park Parade (the local high street) had worsened significantly. She felt that the problems arose in part from the two way traffic systems on three of the roads adjoining Park Parade (Harlesden Gardens, Sellons Avenue and Springwell Avenue), which frequently caused 'bottlenecks' of road traffic. She put forward that some of the reasons which contributed to this included: not being able to turn onto the road when another car is coming in the opposite direction; double parking on the road; and cars on the high street using the three roads as a cut through. She also mentioned that there were two bus stops which created a traffic backlog and three schools in the Harlesden Gardens area which contributed to the severe disruption at pick-up times. She also drew Members' attention to the rise of anti-social behaviour in the form of road rage and that her children had witnessed violent and expletive confrontations between drivers. She concluded that this was an issue affecting all of the residents in this area, and that only one person she had spoken to had refused to sign her petition on this issue.

Amanda McKenzie (resident of Harlesden Gardens) noted that she had lived in Harlesden for 16 years and had been a resident of the Harlesden Gardens area for nine years. She said that the traffic problems were intolerable on the three roads in question, but that they wanted to offer a solution to the Council. She directed Members to a map of the roads, which had been circulated within the Chamber, which identified the possibility of creating a 'natural loop' of access to the three roads. She felt that this would assist in easing the traffic flow on these three roads, and have a beneficial effect for residents in the area. She explained her proposals in more detail according to the map, specifying which sections of the roads would be one way and which would be proposed to remain two way. She also mentioned that a similar system had been introduced on Buckingham Road and Wendover Roads in the past, and it was known to be working well. She concluded by asking the Council to consider their proposal find a solution to the problems raised.

Councillor Southwood (Lead Member for Environment) thanked the residents for their deputation and Ward Councillors for visiting the roads in question. She stated that she felt that Council could, and should, do something to address this. She noted that the narrowness of the roads compounded the issue and the presence of the schools in the vicinity caused concern. She raised that she had also been receiving an increasing volume of emails on concerns about anti-social behaviour occurring at school pick-up times. Members heard that the issue raised in the deputation was timely as Council Officers were due to be meet Transport for London (TfL) on the impact of the Harlesden Town Centre Scheme and that there was a perception at this stage that the scheme may have had a negative knock-on effect on traffic around Harlesden. She advised Members that the speed limit for the area was already 20 miles-per-hour but there were other potential things that could be instigated by the Highways department to stop cars parking on double yellow lines. Although it was also noted that any short term measures would require funding and would need to consider any others which might have an effect on the area. She acknowledged the positive impact of the aforementioned systems introduced on Buckingham Road and Wendover Roads and proposed that Councillors, Officers and residents all work together in the short term to develop a sustainable long-term solution to these issues.

## **6. Housing Management Options Review - Outcome of Formal Consultation**

The Mayor outlined that the procedure for this item had been agreed with all three group leaders and the Council's Chief Executive. He outlined that Councillor Farah (Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform) would introduce the item; followed by a speech from the Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee; which would be followed by a general debate which would be open to all Members. The item would conclude with a summary from the Lead Member.

Councillor Farah introduced the report which set out the outcomes from the formal consultation undertaken with tenants and leaseholders on the Council's future housing management service provision. Councillor Farah began by thanking the BHP Board and staff for their support during a difficult period over the last two years. He gave some background to Full Council on the reasons that the review had come about, citing significant concerns about BHP's performance which began towards the end of 2015. He noted that review formally started in June 2016 and Cabinet heard the three identified options for housing management services going forward at its meeting in November 2017. These were:

- (i) To continue with BHP on a reformed basis;
- (ii) To bring the service back in-house; or
- (iii) To enter into partnership with another organisation to provide the service.

Councillor Farah outlined that Cabinet had rejected the partnership option as it was deemed to have had too many risks and rejected the option to reform BHP as Cabinet did not have confidence in BHP to make the necessary improvements or savings that needed to be achieved. He specified that Cabinet had chosen its preferred option to bring the housing management service back in-house as it was expected to be easier to achieve savings and would also give the Council direct control to be able to drive up standards. This would in turn deliver better services for tenants and leaseholders. He noted the consultation which had been undertaken with residents since November 2016 and the different aspects of this which included: newsletters; information on the Council's website; a dedicated hotline; a dedicated freepost address; drop-in events; and an independent survey which had a 26% response rate. He drew Members' attention to the fact the survey's key finding was that 49% of BHP respondents support, or tended to support, the Council's proposal and only 8% preferred the reformed BHP option.

He set out the additional reasons for the in-house option being considered preferable, such as: there no longer being a financial advantage to having an arm's length management organisation (ALMO); a single leadership team would provide clarity of accountability and reduce costs; opportunities to bring Council expertise to addressing BHP challenges whether on the frontline or in back off functions; and opportunities to join up services and remove an unnecessary divides which currently existed between Council and BHP services. He noted that it was for these reasons that ALMOs in London had reduced from 20 in 2009 to eight in 2017. He added that most ALMO arrangements were not always clear and that there was not always much to distinguish between what could be run operationally by the Council's Housing Department. He concluded that his main focus was for residents' voices to be heard in shaping housing management services and asked for Members to support the proposals put forward in the report - of which Cabinet would make the final decision on.

Councillor Ketan Sheth (Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee) began by stating that housing was a huge challenge within the borough. He said that Members knew this, not just because of the stats on homelessness and temporary accommodation, but also from the housing issues that residents frequently tell them that they face. He mentioned that the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee convened for a special meeting in October 2016 to discuss the review of the different options for the Council's housing management services. He was pleased that the recommendations made at that meeting were taken forward and had been contained within the report before Full Council. He also outlined that members of the Committee had undertaken 'walkabouts' in BHP estates across the borough, including Wembley, Kilburn and Cricklewood and that it had been valuable for the Committee to be able to see services for themselves. Members' heard that a resident had approached the Committee Members and voiced their frustrations. Returning to the special Scrutiny Committee meeting in October, Councillor Ketan Sheth outlined how satisfying it was that so many BHP residents were in attendance and that the Council should be proud that it was able to engage with so many of them.

He continued by specifying the three recommendations that the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee had set out for Cabinet (contained under paragraph 15 of the report) and the reasoning. He re-iterated that it was pleasing that these had been taken into account and it also highlighted the role that the Scrutiny Committees had in teasing out problems before important key decisions are taken. He concluded that Councillor Farah had made it clear at the special Scrutiny meeting back in October that he wanted resident engagement to be at the core of the new housing management arrangements and that he hoped that this would definitively happen.

The Mayor then opened the debate up to Members.

Councillor Kansagra (Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group) began by recalling that Full Council had welcomed the original decision to create BHP as an ALMO to deliver the Council's housing management services (in 2002) and often applauded BHP's work at Council meetings. He stated that it was important to assess what had gone wrong since then. He said that when the Council established BHP it was hoped that a private business culture would be established to drive the management of the service forward, and it was unfortunate that this ultimately never happened. He felt that this was because the Council's internal work practices and culture had been incorporated within the creation of the ALMO. He also felt that strategic direction from the Council had been lacking at that time which had contributed in a number of ways to the current problems. He stated that, in his opinion, the option in the report for pursuing a reformed BHP was the preferable route for Cabinet to take. He noted that this reform should also encompass more involvement for the relevant Scrutiny Committee and more Councillors on the BHP Board with additional powers to assist with oversight of the ALMO.

Councillor Shahzad stated that there had been a high level of concern about BHP from both its tenants and leaseholders in Cricklewood. He stated that the high number of complaints about the service had not been acceptable and that the proposal to bring the management of the service back in-house provided a way of addressing this. He said that when the management of housing had been provided in-house, before BHP had been created, it had been a superior service. He concluded that it was beneficial for the Council that the proposed option would save money and that he was certain this option would provide a better service for residents.

Councillor Collier outlined that he was concerned about the proposed decision to bring the housing management service back in-house. He said that he could not remember a time of such unanimity of agreement between Councillors and Officers for a key decision affecting the Council. He emphasised that the decision to enter into a repairs and maintenance contract with Wates had contributed to BHP's problems as Wates had not had the supply chain or staffing levels to deliver the key elements to the contract. He felt that the BHP Board had been inhibited by this contract in what had, in effect, been a political decision taken by the Council. He also raised concerns about a lack of strategic direction within the Council, stating that it had been a significant error not to utilise BHP for new builds and questioned why filling voids (unoccupied properties) and undertaking repair work to properties had not been addressed more quickly. He re-iterated that this was linked to the failure of the contract with Wates. He concluded that he felt the proposed decision

would take away both the expertise of its members and the community voice if the BHP Board was disbanded. He also raised that the problems would only continue if it was largely the same people involved in delivering housing management services.

Councillor Long began by declaring that she was a previous BHP Board Member. She also noted her concerns for how the housing management service would function if it was brought back in-house. She questioned how the future decisions relating to the service would be made, stating that having it within the portfolio of one Lead Member and having decisions come through Cabinet could cause delays which might affect the service. She said that it was also possible that decisions would be delegated to Council Officers which would mean less transparency for residents. She highlighted that the in-house option would still incur transfer costs and that it would be difficult for the Cabinet to manage expectations of what can be achieved under the proposed new arrangements. She mentioned that the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee had considered the three different options and offered recommendations but questioned why BHP's problems had not been scrutinised more regularly and addressed before reaching this point.

Councillor Jones emphasised the amount of casework she had had to deal with from BHP leaseholders in recent years. She noted that this had centred on inadequate information from BHP when work was proposed and the length of time it took to address any problems. She said that she hoped that proposals would work in addressing the issues facing residents.

Councillor Colacicco raised points to Council on the link between poorly insulated homes and mental health problems. She noted that the UK's housing stock had the lowest level of energy efficiency in Europe. She added that cold homes and poverty went hand in hand and that the Council should take control and make warm housing a priority for its Council housing stock.

Councillor Kabir stated that in principle she was in agreement with the proposal to bring the housing management service back in-house but would have preferred a greater level of detail on the logistics of where this would be placed within the Council's structure. She raised that, going forward, it was very important for Members to have channels for referrals of housing-related casework to social services, children and young people services, environmental services, the police, relevant voluntary sector organisations and others. She also stated that any future contracts should be value for money and ensure that tenant and leaseholder interests are taken into account. She continued that the relevant Scrutiny Committee should have a more prominent role in overseeing the management of the Council's housing stock, with arrangements to ensure tenants and leaseholders are involved alongside frequent Committee recommendations to Cabinet. She also implored that it was essential that the Council took into consideration the need to adapt houses for those children and adults with special needs.

Councillor Mashari began by congratulating Councillor Farah and Phil Porter (the Council's Strategic Director of Community Wellbeing) for the undertaking the review and formal consultation. She emphasised that it was important for Members not to glaze over the issues which had contributed in getting to this point. She said that all Members had horror stories on the quality of BHP service from residents and that it was very important that those responsible for delivering housing management

services both in the past and moving forward were accountable. She noted that she did not necessarily believe bringing the service back in-house would be a silver bullet to solve the problems which had occurred. She made clear that governance; transparency; quality of service; and resident collaboration would be the key in ensuring the in-housing option was successful. She agreed with other Members that scrutiny arrangements would also be crucial, and that there should be a detailed change management plan with a definitive timetable reporting to the relevant Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis. She concluded that it was important that the Cabinet got this decision right and that she did not want to see the Council having to go back to an ALMO model in another ten years' time.

Councillor S Choudhary welcomed the plan to bring housing management services back in-house. He noted that he was an ex-BHP trustee and had experienced the problems which had led to the review. He said that Brent's BHP residents were fed up with the level of service from BHP, largely caused by the lack of repairs, and that Members heard the complaints constantly through emails and at Councillors' Surgeries. He stated that all Members should want to make a success of the proposal. He added that arrangements for genuine resident engagement would be crucial. He concluded that it was also essential that the Council now ensured that it had a proper standard of mechanics and electricians to be able to carry out repairs on the properties quickly and effectively.

Councillor Carr stated she was largely in agreement with the earlier points made by Councillors Collier and Long and she was not convinced that bringing the housing management service back in-house was the best way forward. She questioned whether the proposed reforms would improve the service and also raised concerns about the practical management arrangements.

Councillor Mahmood said that whilst he had found BHP had been viewed favourably by residents in the past, in the last few years it was clear that problems had arisen which had affected this view. He stated he supported Cabinet's proposal in principle, but that if the Council did not perform well under the new arrangements then it would be letting residents down. He recorded his hope that things could improve. He concluded by thanking BHP staff for their services and thanked Officers for undertaking the review work.

With no other Member indicating that they wished to speak, the Mayor invited Councillor Farah to conclude.

Councillor Farah thanked Members for their contributions in the debate and acknowledged that he had listened to the concerns and issues raised. He stated that past experience should not paralyse the Council and emphasised that it should continue to always be forward looking. He said it would be possible to learn from past experiences and believed that the proposal would allow the organisation to do a better job with limited resources. He outlined that Cabinet would assess the concerns raised and that he, as Lead Member, would respond in due course. He assured Members that the views of tenants and leaseholders would be at the heart of the housing management service arrangements. He welcomed Members' support and said that he would welcome ideas and engagement with Members over the next 12 months. He concluded that he was confident that a better service could be delivered for residents and asked Members to support the recommendations within the report.

Councillor Kansagra raised a final point, on behalf of the Conservative Group, which asked that Cabinet re-consider the 'Reformed BHP' option (as specified under paragraph 4.7 (i) within the report) when it took its decision.

**RESOLVED that:**

- (i) The outcome of the formal consultation regarding the proposal that the housing management functions and other delegated roles exercised by Brent Housing Partnership Ltd. be exercised by the Council thus requiring termination of the management agreement, be noted;
- (ii) New arrangements for scrutiny for this function which will constructively engage residents, be noted;
- (iii) The main points of the Council's discussion of the report be referred to Cabinet when it meets to consider the consultation responses and make the final decision on the Council's housing management service options.

**7. Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business to be transacted.

The meeting closed at 7.58 pm

COUNCILLOR PARVEZ AHMED  
Mayor

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