

## **ASSEMBLY**

Wednesday, 28 June 2006  
(7:00 - 8:00 pm)

### **PRESENT**

Councillor J Davis (Chair)  
Councillor W F L Barns (Deputy Chair)

|                              |                              |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Councillor A Agrawal         | Councillor J L Alexander     |
| Councillor Mrs S J Baillie   | Councillor R J Barnbrook     |
| Councillor G J Bramley       | Councillor R J Buckley       |
| Councillor Ms E Carpenter    | Councillor H J Collins       |
| Councillor N Connelly        | Councillor J R Denyer        |
| Councillor M A R Fani        | Councillor Mrs K J Flint     |
| Councillor N S S Gill        | Councillor S S Gill          |
| Councillor D Hemmett         | Councillor I S Jamu          |
| Councillor J K Jarvis        | Councillor S Kallar          |
| Councillor Mrs C A Knight    | Councillor Miss T A Lansdown |
| Councillor R C Little        | Councillor M A McCarthy      |
| Councillor J E McDermott     | Councillor M E McKenzie      |
| Councillor Mrs P A Northover | Councillor W W Northover     |
| Councillor E O Obasohan      | Councillor B Poulton         |
| Councillor Mrs J E Rawlinson | Councillor Mrs L A Reason    |
| Councillor Mrs V M Rush      | Councillor L Rustem          |
| Councillor L A Smith         | Councillor Miss N E Smith    |
| Councillor D A Tuffs         | Councillor Mrs P A Twomey    |
| Councillor G M Vincent       | Councillor L R Waker         |
| Councillor P T Waker         | Councillor J R White         |

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

|                               |                          |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Councillor R W Bailey         | Councillor S Carroll     |
| Councillor Miss C L Doncaster | Councillor R W Doncaster |
| Councillor Mrs S A Doncaster  | Councillor C J Fairbrass |
| Councillor Mrs D Hunt         | Councillor Mrs M M West  |

#### **23. Minutes (7 June 2006)**

**Agreed.**

#### **24. Appointments**

Police Community Consultative – Councillor N Connelly

#### **25. General Question Time**

Councillor Jarvis stated that the British National Party agree that the Citizen is an informative magazine and has an important role to play within our community. He asked would it not be worth considering using recycled paper to print the publication as

opposed to the current glossy magazine format? We believe this would be a positive move to show how the Council would again demonstrate how it is continually striving to do its bit to help the environment and may also end up being more economical in overall costs.

Councillor L Smith responded that the Council takes environmental issues very seriously. He informed that the paper which the Citizen is printed on is white, totally chlorine free, environmentally friendly gloss paper. The paperpulp is generated from managed sustainable renewable forests from Europe. The paper from these forests is bleached using natural chemicals and all waste is then recycled for re-use.

The reason the printers do not use recycled paper is because it uses post consumer waste such as old newspapers, or post production waste such as unused paper which never left the mill. It also has to be chemically cleaned and re-pulped for inclusion in the manufacture of new paper and uses more limited resources. This recycling method can still contain new paper fibre. These grades of paper are less easily available and therefore more expensive. The Citizen's printers do not buy any paper from sources that are not accredited or are detrimental to the environment. The method used produces a saving of around £17,000 each year.

Councillor Mrs Knight referred to a letter from Assistant Chief Executive Nina Clark to Councillor Barnbrook, dated 22 June 2006, replying to his questions as to how many council houses are in the borough, where they are and how many are vacant on average at any given time. The Assistant Chief Executive stated in a letter that "Members need to say 'no' to constituents" when they ask for such figures to be made public, and refused to divulge this information.

Mrs Knight asked if this Council will condemn, and take urgent steps to correct this corrosive 'culture of secrecy' whereby highly paid officials believe that they know better than the local residents whose taxes pay their salaries, and think that they have the right to deny local voters the right to basic information about the housing stock of this Borough or, for that matter, any other affairs of the Council, given that officers are supposed to be there to serve local residents, not to treat them like mushrooms?

Councillor L Smith responded by saying no, officers do a good job in serving the Council and that he could see no benefit in local residents knowing how many Council owned homes were in the Borough and where they are. There are some 20,000+ Council owned homes in the Borough. Certain information such as voids is available by attending meetings of the Community Housing Partnerships (CHPs). As a Council tenant himself, Councillor Smith said that he would have no problem in people knowing he is a Council tenant but he would have concerns that such information could be used for political gain and used to compare addresses against the Electoral Register. It would not be fair on Council tenants to reveal the information and he was glad that Nina Clark took the action that she did.

Councillor Barnbrook referred to the media coverage of the shocking anti-English racism displayed by officials of the Council to Debbie Dredge of Abbey Ward and asked would she now receive a formal apology from David Woods, as the Corporate Director responsible for Housing, and from Councillor L Smith, as holder of the Portfolio for

Housing. Will an investigation now be undertaken to discover the origin of the racist policy which, contrary to the Council's 'in principle' opposition to discrimination, has led to residents being discriminated against simply on account of the fact that they are guilty of speaking "perfect English"? Also, how many other people have, like Debbie Dredge, been discriminated against by council officials and departments because they speak "perfect English"? Further, may the residents of the Borough now be assured that the council will review all its policies to ensure that this and any other institutionally racist anti-English attitudes and policies will be rooted out?"

Councillor L Smith stated no, Ms Dredge will not receive an apology from himself or David Woods. The article that appeared in the Sunday newspaper only tells one side of the story. Councillor Smith stated that he did not want to go through Ms Dredge's personal circumstances in a public meeting. Ms Dredge owed in excess of £2,000 in rent and had difficulty in making payments. She was put up by her daughter but her daughter wouldn't have her so was homeless. Councillor Smith was pleased to see that the article in the newspaper showed that the Council was doing its job. Ms Dredge did not meet the criteria as she had presented herself as intentionally homeless and Ms Dredge still has the right to appeal against this. Officers have implemented the legislation.

Councillor Smith agreed that the letter could have been worded better, but it is important that people understand the grounds on which they might be considered vulnerable. Being unable to communicate effectively is one of those grounds and unfortunately this was expressed as the ability to speak English. Someone who is deaf could be considered not to be able to communicate in English and may be considered vulnerable. Council housing is in short supply and we do not have enough homes to meet the demands placed upon us.

Ms Dredge could still make an application under More Choice in Lettings for any Council property that comes up and will be treated fairly. It would be seen as unfair that Ms Dredge be allocated a property ahead of other people just because she went to a newspaper. We will not let people jump the system.

Councillor Rustem asked if there are any other council, housing association or other social housing properties used in a similar way to The Lintons elsewhere in the Borough?

Councillor L Smith referred to the original question, which was submitted in three parts:

"Further to a letter from David Woods to Cllr Richard Barnbrook dated 20th June 2006:

- 1) can it be confirmed whether or not the figures for people housed in the borough from outside Barking and Dagenham include:
  - People who have arrive from abroad so recently that they have not been recorded as living in another borough?
  - People recorded as homeless, either in this borough or any other?
  - Those who were previously living in a 'halfway' house such as The Lintons?"

- 2) Are there any other council, housing association or other social housing properties used in a similar way to The Lintons elsewhere in the borough?
- 3) Did the figures supplied by David Woods include council housing, housing association properties and any other forms of social housing in the borough?"

In response to the first part of the question, Councillor Smith categorically stated no, the Council does not house Asylum Seekers. Asylum Seekers are referred to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS, 240 - 250 Ferndale Road, Brixton London SW9 8BB).

Councillor Smith confirmed that there were five cases of homeless applicants who were registered with other boroughs and were referred to Barking and Dagenham for accommodation:

Case 1 – a 57 year old former Council tenant with serious health problems and a victim of Domestic Violence. This person fled the Borough but because of health problems wanted to come back to Barking and Dagenham for support from a daughter living in the Borough.

Case 2 – an applicant and child who were former residents in the Borough. They had secured a private sector rented property in a neighbouring borough but were evicted at the end of the agreed tenancy period. This family has lived in the Borough for three years out of the last five years and with a family connection to the area.

Case 3 – an applicant and child who were former residents in the Borough who had fled from domestic violence at a property in West London. This family has lived in the Borough for three years out of the last five years.

Case 4 – an applicant and child who had lost a private sector rented accommodation. This family has lived in the Borough for three years out of the last five years.

Case 5 – an applicant who is pregnant who had lost a private sector rented accommodation in a neighbouring borough. This applicant has lived in the Borough for three years out of the last five years.

Councillor Smith stated that he felt these cases were justified and noted that under the local connection criteria, the Council had placed thirty homeless applicants with other councils.

In response to the second part of the question, properties used in the same way as The Lintons, Councillor Smith replied, no, none at all.

In response to the third part of the question, Councillor Smith confirmed that no the figures supplied did not and that there was no reason for this. This was a case of the British National Party not getting the answer that they were looking for.

Councillor Tuffs asked how many Joint Tenancy Agreements have been signed between private landlords and the authorities in this Borough and how many properties, housing how many people, are covered by Joint Tenancy Agreements between this council and the Home Office?

Councillor L Smith stated that the question did not make sense. The Council can only give secure tenancies on properties it owns. In respect of "Joint Tenancy Agreements between this council and the Home Office", again this does not make sense. The Council does not have any agreements, formal or informal, with the Home Office to house anyone.

## **26. Statement of Accounts 2005 / 2006**

Received a report providing an overview of the financial accounts for 2005 / 2006 and seeking approval of the interim Statement of Accounts.

**Agreed** to approve the unaudited Statement of Accounts for 2005 / 2006, as required by the Audit and Accounting Regulations 2003.

A final version incorporating an Audit Certificate will be reported to the Assembly after the completion of the audit.

The meeting had a full and detailed discussion on the accounts presented to them with questions to the Head of Corporate Finance covering the councils capital spending, the revenue budget outturn, its reserves position particularly around capital receipts, pension fund accounts, the position of the housing revenue account, the composition and governance arrangements around Thames Gateway London Partnership, the value for money on fees paid to external auditors and other subsidiary questions pertaining to the accounts.

Councillor L Smith stated that due to sound financial management the Council was one of few council's in a debt free position and that as one of the most deprived areas of London the Council works hard to secure as much funding from central Government as possible. Councillor Smith also stated that because of the debt free position, the Council made payments of £8,238,000 to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister from the Housing Revenue Account. Only two other councils in London made similar payments and these are some of the richest London Boroughs. Labour Group Councillors and the two Members of Parliament will continue to lobby Government for the return of this money which could then be spent on the existing housing stock by way of repairs or purchasing of new properties to add to the Council's portfolio.