

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

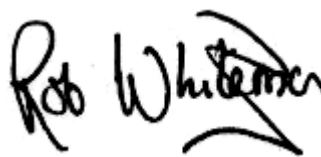
Notice of Meeting

ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 6 December 2006 - 7:00 pm
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Barking

To: Members of the Council of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Chair: Councillor J Davis
Deputy-Chair: Councillor W F L Barns



R. A. Whiteman
Chief Executive

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AGENDA

- 1. Apologies for Absence**
- 2. Declaration of Members Interest**

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Members are asked to declare any personal or prejudicial interest they may have in any matter which is to be considered at this meeting.
- 3. Minutes - To confirm as correct the minutes of the ordinary Assembly meeting held on 11 October 2006 and the Special Assembly meeting held on 11 October 2006 (Pages 1 - 12)**
- 4. Presentation by Anne Bristow, Corporate Director of Adult and Community Services**

5. Local Government Ombudsman - Annual Letter 2005 / 2006 (Pages 13 - 17)

Tony Redmond, the Local Government Ombudsman, will present his annual letter for 2005 / 2006

6. Local Issue - Heritage Services Presentation

Presentation by Heather Wills, Head of Community Services and Libraries, Judith Etherton, Borough Archivist and Birthe Christensen, Museum Manager, Valence House.

7. Motions (Pages 19 - 21)

To debate and vote on motions submitted in accordance with Part B, Article 2, paragraph 15 of the Council Constitution.

8. Appointments

9. Leader's Question Time

10. General Question Time

11. Final Report of the Leasehold Management Scrutiny Panel (Pages 23 - 34)

12. Any other public items which the Chair decides are urgent

13. To consider whether it would be appropriate to pass a resolution to exclude the public and press from the remainder of the meeting due to the nature of the business to be transacted.

Private Business

The public and press have a legal right to attend Council meetings such as the Assembly, except where business is confidential or certain other sensitive information is to be discussed. The list below shows why items are in the private part of the agenda, with reference to the relevant legislation (the relevant paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended). There are no such items at the time of preparing this agenda.

14. Any confidential or exempt items which the Chair decides are urgent

This is an agenda for a Council meeting. You can ask for this information in your own language by ticking one of the boxes, filling in your name and address, indicating the relevant page numbers and returning this form to the address at the end of the page.

1. Kjo është një listë e çështjeve për diskutim ne mbledhjen e Këshillit.
 Ju mund t'kërkoni për informacion ne gjuhën tuaj duke shtuar një prej kutive. Plotsoni emrin dhe adresën tuaj, cili soni numrin e faqeve t' duhura, dhe kthejeni kët formular në adresën në fund t' faqes.
2. 這是一份區議會會議的議程。如果你想索取以中文提供的這些資料，請在適用的空格內填上勾號，並填寫你的姓名和地址，說明你想索取哪幾頁，然後將這份表格寄回本頁尾的地址。
3. Ceci est l'ordre du jour d'une réunion du Conseil Municipal. Vous pouvez en demander la traduction dans votre langue en cochant l'une des cases, en indiquant votre nom et adresse et le numéro des pages qui vous intéressent et en renvoyant ce formulaire à l'adresse indiquée en fin de page.
4. Oyo ezali agenda po na likita ya mairie. Okoki kosenga information oyo na monoko nayo moko soki oponi yoko ya ba boites, okomi kombo na adresse nayo, olakisi ba numeros ya ba pages oyo ezali important sima ozingisi formulaire oyo na adresse oyo ezali na suka ya page.
5. Porządek dzienny spotkania rady. Aby uzyskać te informacje w języku polskim, proszę zaznaczyć jedną z poniższych krzatek, wpisać swoje dane oraz adres, zaznaczyć numery odpowiednich stron i odesłać ten formularz na poniżej podany adres.
6. Isto é uma ordem-do-dia para uma reunião do Município. Pode pedir esta informação na sua língua ao pôr um sinal numa das caixas, preencher o seu nome e morada, indicando os números das páginas concernentes e devolver esta forma para a morada no final desta página.
7. ਇਹ ਕਾਊਂਸਲ ਦੀ ਮੀਟਿੰਗ ਦਾ ਏਜੰਡਾ ਹੈ। ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਲੈਣ ਲਈ ਕਿਸੇ ਇਕ ਖਾਨੇ ਵਿਚ ਨਿਸ਼ਾਨ (ਟਿੱਕ) ਲਗਾ ਕੇ, ਆਪਣਾ ਨਾਮ ਅਤੇ ਪਤਾ ਲਿਖਕੇ, ਢੁਕਵੇਂ (ਲੋੜੀਂਦੇ) ਪੰਨਿਆਂ ਬਾਰੇ ਸੂਚਿਤ ਕਰਕੇ ਅਤੇ ਪੰਨੇ ਦੇ ਅਖੀਰ ਵਿਚ ਦਿਤੇ ਗਏ ਸਿਰਨਾਵੇਂ ਉਪਰ ਇਹ ਫਾਰਮ ਵਾਪਿਸ ਭੇਜ ਸਕਦੇ ਹੋ।
8. Qoraalkani waa ajandaha kulanka kawnsalka. Waxaad codsan kartaa in laguugu turjumo luqaddaada adigoo saxaya mid ka mid ah sanduuqyada, kuna buuxinaya magaca iyo cinwaankaaga, sheeg lambarrada bogagga kadibna foomka ku soo celi cinwaanka ku yaal dhammaadka boggan.

9. Huu ni utaratibu wa mkutano wa Halmashauri wa jiji. Unaweza kuomba maelezo haya kwa lugha yako ukiweka alama ya pata kwenye kisanduku kimojawapo, andika jina lako na anuani yako, uonyeshe kurasa unazotaka zitafsiwiwe halafu rejsha fomu hii kwenye anuani iliyoandikwa hapo chini.

10. Elinizdeki bu metin, bir belediye toplantısının gündemidir. Hangi sayfaların Türkçe'ye çevrilmesini istiyorsanız, lütfen uygun kutuyu işaretleyerek, çevrilmesini gerekli gördüğünüz sayfa numaralarını belirtip, isminizi ve adresinizi yazdıktan sonra bu formu sayfanın sonundaki adrese gönderin.

11. یہ کونسل کی میٹنگ کا ایجنڈا ہے۔ آپ ان میں سے ایک خانے پر ٹک کا نشان لگا کر اپنا نام اور پتہ لکھ کر متعلقہ صفحات کی نشاندہی کرنے اور اس فارم کو صفحے کے آخر میں دیئے گئے پتے پر ارسال کرنے کے ذریعے اس معلومات کو اپنی زبان میں حاصل کرنے کی درخواست کر سکتے ہیں۔

If you would like this information on audio tape or in large print please contact us at the same address or phone on 020 8227 2135.

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Pages:

Please return to:

Democratic and Electoral Services
Barking and Dagenham Council
Civic Centre
Dagenham
RM10 7BN

ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 11 October 2006
(7:00 - 8:11 pm)

PRESENT

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

Councillor A Agrawal	Councillor J L Alexander
Councillor R W Bailey	Councillor Mrs S J Baillie
Councillor R J Barnbrook	Councillor G J Bramley
Councillor R J Buckley	Councillor Ms E Carpenter
Councillor S Carroll	Councillor H J Collins
Councillor J R Denyer	Councillor R W Doncaster
Councillor C J Fairbrass	Councillor M A R Fani
Councillor Mrs K J Flint	Councillor S S Gill
Councillor Mrs D Hunt	Councillor I S Jamu
Councillor J K Jarvis	Councillor S Kallar
Councillor Mrs C A Knight	Councillor Miss T A Lansdown
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 H S Rai
Councillor Mrs L A Reason	Councillor Mrs V M Rush
Councillor Miss N E Smith	Councillor J Steed
Councillor D A Tuffs	Councillor Mrs P A Twomey
Councillor G M Vincent	Councillor L R Waker
Councillor P T Waker	Councillor Mrs M M West

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor N Connelly	Councillor Miss C L Doncaster
Councillor Mrs S A Doncaster	Councillor N S S Gill
Councillor D Hemmett	Councillor R C Little
Councillor Mrs J E Rawlinson	Councillor L Rustem
Councillor L A Smith	Councillor J R White

43. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest

44. Minutes (6 September 2006)

Agreed.

45. Petition - Mill Lane Road Safety Measures

Received a report outlining details of a petition received regarding Mill Lane, Chadwell Heath. The petition asked for additional safety measures to be installed to assist the high number of pedestrians, particularly children, who cross at the junction with Ashton Garden.

Noted that Mill Lane is included in the programme of highways maintenance works for the current year and the existing chicanes would need to be temporarily removed to enable the highway maintenance works to be undertaken. This provides an opportunity to review and modify the existing traffic calming features.

Agreed, in order to modify the existing traffic calming scheme to maintain the low levels of road accidents, while gaining increased community acceptance and improving pedestrian crossing facilities at Mill Lane near Ashton Gardens, to:

1. Undertake consultation with residents of Mill Lane and the emergency services to change the traffic management and calming features in Mill Lane from chicanes to a combination of speed tables and speed cushions;
2. The use of speed cushions on bus routes and to adopt this approach in Mill Lane where a bus route is proposed; and
3. The installation of a speed table at the junction of Mill Lane and Ashton Gardens, with the installation of a zebra crossing at this location.

46. Local Issue - London Borough of Barking and Dagenham Children and Young People's Plan

Received a report and presentation from Meena Kishinani, Head of Children's Policy and Trust Commissioning, introducing the Children and Young People's Plan, which sets out how the Council and its partners will improve children and young people's lives over the next three years.

Agreed the content of the Children and Young People's Plan in order to address the five outcomes for children and young people set out in the Government's 'Every Child Matters' programme.

47. Customer Service Presentation

Meena Kishinani, Head of Children's Policy and Trust Commissioning, gave a presentation on customer service issues in the Children's Policy and Trust Commissioning Division.

A number of questions were raised, which included the performance of 'Looked After Children', how the Council would continue to improve performance at GCSE, concerns regarding the standards of GCSEs and how attendance rates could be improved.

We have placed on record our appreciation for the work being undertaken by staff both in local schools and in the Children's Services Department.

48. Appointments

There were no appointments.

49. Leader's Question Time

Councillor Bailey stated that in his opinion, Barking and Dagenham has some of the poorest wards and some of the unhealthiest inhabitants of any Borough in the UK. There is a housing crisis, the local NHS Trust has had £14 million clawed back from the Borough and violent crime and lawlessness is growing. People are not happy with the way the Labour Group has reigned over Barking and Dagenham all these many years.

He asked Councillor Fairbrass if he feels any responsibility for failing the people of Barking and Dagenham and if he did, to do the honourable thing and resign, handing over to someone more able.

Councillor Fairbrass responded by stating that the short answer to the question was No, he was not going to resign his post as Leader of the Council. As Leader of the Council he was appointed by his Party colleagues and had been in post for the past nine years.

In response to the point made about housing, Councillor Fairbrass stated that we do not have a housing crisis. We do have a housing list, which we are dealing with.

Since the Housing Strategy between 2003 and 2006 with our partners, we have developed 938 new affordable homes in the Borough. Within that number we have produced 102 new four and five bed houses, the first produced in the Borough since the late 1950s, and before the former Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham amalgamated.

Our records also show we have particularly provided for those in our community who have special housing needs. We have provided, with the Housing Association partners, 111 superb extra care homes for the older population. We have provided four more domestic violence refuge places, six supported flats have been created for single teenage parents and we have created 71 Council self contained flats for local people who were unfortunate enough to become homeless.

We will be increasing our target for new affordable homes in our Housing Strategy for 2007. We currently have a further 52 extra care places being built, some of which will be built in the Heath Ward, and we should soon be able to provide for 116 local young people, who need extra support, through the Foyer project, which is under development in the Barking Town Centre.

Overall, in the next three years, we will develop 1,024 affordable homes. Our record on tackling homelessness is second to none and we have no families living in bed and breakfast. We have invested in two new centres for homeless people on Bevan Avenue and Ravensfield Close, where homeless people can be helped back into the community with dignity and self respect.

In addition to providing more homes, we are looking at support infrastructure, such as GP surgeries, etc. and Councillor Fairbrass was pleased to announce that there would be an extension of the Docklands Light Railway link through to Dagenham Dock.

In response to the point made about crime, Councillor Fairbrass stated that crime was reducing, not going up. To date this year the Borough has seen substantial reductions in violent crime. Wounding has reduced by 11.2%, common assault by 6.8% and total violent crime is down by 4.7%. These figures have been provided by the local police.

In response to the point made about health, he stated that improvements in health care continue to be made, as recently reported to the Assembly by Matthew Cole, Joint Director of Public Health. They are:

- Reducing premature mortality in the under 75s in specific areas, cancer and circulatory diseases
- Improving access to smoking cessation services
- Increased uptake in influenza immunisation in the older population and those at risk
- Increased uptake in breastfeeding
- Reduced rate of smoking during pregnancy, leading to healthier babies
- Lower infant mortality rates
- Improved male life expectancy

A letter was sent to the Secretary of State seeking assurances that funding clawed back from the local Primary Care Trust would be repaid, and a letter has been received from the relevant Minister.

Councillor Fairbrass stated that if, as was claimed, the people were unhappy with the way the Labour Group had 'reigned' over Barking and Dagenham over many years, how was it that the Labour Group are the controlling majority party?

50. General Question Time

Councillor Vincent referred to the Borough's GCSE results and stated that these are an important test of how well the Council and schools are working with each other to drive up standards. This year's results show another year of considerable improvement. Councillor Vincent asked how this had been achieved.

Councillor Alexander referred to the earlier Customer Service presentation, in which details of the improvements in GCSEs were referred to. She explained that this was in part due to the long standing, sustained partnership between this Council, Members, officers and the schools.

Well over a decade ago the Council took the decision that the performance of our young people was not good enough. Ten years ago, only 27% of 16 year olds were getting five good grades at GCSE.

Since then, the Council has made improving the achievement of our young people a top priority. Sustained backing has been given to Headteachers as has considerable investment in buildings, resources, training, recruitment, advice and

guidance. Schools now provide lunch clubs, after school clubs, and homework clubs to help students complete their homework.

She stated that this Council is placing its belief in its students that grades will improve, which in turn helps students to believe in themselves, despite what the opposition Party says.

Councillor P Waker noted that the Council has one of the highest rates in London of care clients controlling their own budgets under the Direct Payments scheme. He asked what the benefits of the Direct Payments Scheme are for our residents.

Councillor Bramley explained that prior to the introduction of the Direct Payments Scheme, community care was always commissioned by the Council to support adults with eligible needs in their own homes. Service users were then reliant on the care providers (whether in-house or private sector) to arrange for carers to visit and provide their support. From working with users and their carers, their feedback was that this system brought a number of difficulties, including:

- Often receiving a different carer every day with no continuity of care;
- Carers being rushed, as they had other people to visit;
- Carers failing to arrive, or arriving too early or too late;
- Lack of flexibility for example wanting to be put to bed later to watch the end of a film was often not possible;
- Care provision was restricted to their own home, no ability to take care with them to go on holiday or visit family out of Borough;
- Care provision was very task orientated for example a care plan that gets someone out of bed at 7am every day, when sometimes that person wants to lie in until 11am; and
- Service users feeling 'done to' rather than having any control over their care provision.

With the introduction of Direct Payments, take-up has been very high because service users find this is a far more empowering and flexible way to arrange their community care. Clear benefits include:

- The ability to recruit their own dedicated personal carer(s);
- The ability to negotiate times of visits at short notice;
- The power being shifted to the service-user, for example if they are unhappy with the service then they are able to purchase care somewhere else; and
- The ability to arrange to go on holiday or to stay with family, yet still be able to purchase care to support them in any other area.

There is also an additional benefit to the Council and the wider-community in that Direct Payments are several pounds an hour cheaper than commissioned care. Such has been the success of implementing Direct Payments, that in March 2006 Barking and Dagenham were chosen by the Department of Health to trial 'Individual Budgets' which are designed to build on the benefits of Direct Payments to help people take control of their own social care budgets, manage their support and choose the services that suit them best. Direct Payments and Individual Budgets puts the service user at the centre of the planning process, and recognises that they are the best person to understand their own needs.

Councillor Reason asked what was the total number of caretakers currently working in the Borough and would there be any extra provision this year.

Councillor Fairbrass stated that there were 67 caretakers, which had been raised to 94, with a further five more being employed later this year. The beneficiaries of these extra caretakers would be the residents who live on flatted estates, as it is the caretakers who help to keep such areas clean and are regularly complimented.

Councillor N Smith referred to the regeneration of the Heathway, including proposals to provide a One-Stop Shop and a new library. She asked if the provision of a supermarket could also be considered.

Councillor Kallar explained that in 2005, nine Labour Councillors had spoken to him, as Lead Portfolio Holder, about regenerating the Heathway shopping area and attracting a supermarket. A report was submitted to the Executive at that time. However, the Council could not make an announcement until it had taken ownership of the Church Elm pub site and entered in to negotiations. The Council are due to have a meeting with the site developers in the very near future to discuss options, which will include a major supermarket chain going in.

Councillor S Gill asked the Lead Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Parks to outline the Council's strategic and investment plans for Barking Park.

Councillor Mrs Rush explained that through the hard work and commitment of officers, Members and the community, the Council has been fortunate enough to have been awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund "Stage 1 Grant" of £3.25m and a "Development Phase Grant" of a further £250,000 for improvements to Barking Park.

The awarding of this grant is subject to match funding by the Council. This match funding will come in the form of Section 106 agreements, and internal capital funding. The details as to how the funding will be achieved will be outlined in detail in an Executive report which is scheduled to be presented on 24 October 2006.

The funding secured for Barking Park will see the 30 hectare park transformed with the redevelopment of the lido area into a community hub for the park, incorporating an interactive wet play area, café and modern, fully accessible toilets.

Entrances to the park will be improved to make them more welcoming, creating new paths and cycleways. Lighting and security will also be upgraded. The lake area will be restored, reinstating the historic features. Also, restoration of the landscaped areas to preserve the historic nature of the park. The boating franchise will stay with improvements to the lake and boathouse.

The sports pavilion will be upgraded to meet current Sport England's standard for the sports users of the park. There will also be a full range of children's play areas from toddler through to youth provision, a skate park and information boards throughout the park to highlight the park's heritage.

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) will be installed throughout the park and the Parks Ranger Service will have a permanent presence in the park. The Parks Rangers will also provide educational events and volunteer development programmes to ensure that as many people as possible use the historic park.

The Friends of Barking Park have been heavily involved in the consultation of the development of the park. There will be £6.75m invested in the park which will mean that the park will become a regional attraction with very high quality park, gardens and facilities.

Councillor Barnbrook asked for confirmation of the total number of former asylum seekers (those who have been granted refugee status or exceptional leave to remain, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave) that:

- (a) have made homelessness applications to this authority under Part VII of the 1996 Housing Act since April 2000,
- (b) have secured accommodation as a result of homelessness applications to this authority under Part VII of the 1996 Housing Act since April 2000,
- (c) have submitted Housing Register applications since April 2000, and
- (d) have been housed in Council or Housing Association properties as a consequence of their Housing Register applications since April 2000.

Councillor Fairbrass stated that the only information kept for Government returns is the number of approaches from people who have been discharged by the National Asylum Seekers Service, these are people who are here legally and are allowed to apply to live anywhere. Although individual files will show the outcome of those approaches, this is not available as a management report because it would not be of any benefit to the Council in any way. The system is not yet computerised and so a manual search would be need to be undertaken, looking at six years worth of records, to retrieve this information.

Councillor Fairbrass referred to the reference made to Part VI of the 1996 Housing Act, and explained that the Council does ask for the immigration status and addresses over the last five years. If satisfactory evidence is produced, this is recorded in the case file. Again, it is not recorded in a management report, and therefore the figure is not available.

Councillor Steed referred to Dagenham and Redbridge Football Club as the Borough's premier football club, and with the distinct possibility of achieving football league status at the end of the current season, is one of the few teams within the Nationwide Football Conference not to have their ground clearly signposted from major trunk roads. He stated that the majority of Conference and League clubs are well signposted and asked what plans are in the pipeline to install 'tourist information' type, brown signposts to the ground from the A12 and the A13.

As Executive Portfolio Holder with responsibility for sport, Councillor Bramley explained that he was delighted to talk about one of his passions – Dagenham and Redbridge Football Club. He noted that it was a distinct possibility for the Club to gain promotion, which would be a proud achievement for the Borough.

However, promotion would bring with it a number of challenges for the club, the Council and the surrounding community.

He referred to this year's team as being one of the best teams the Club has had. He praised the team's captain, Anwar Uddin, for leading by example, who, incidentally, is a Bangladeshi and a Muslim. Should the Club go on to win silverware this year, it would be the captain that would be awarded the trophy on behalf of the club.

He stated that Dagenham and Redbridge Football Club is multicultural and that he did not care what colour the players were as long as they were wearing the red of the Club's shirt.

The Council is proud to support the Club as a community centre. The ground is owned by the Council and is used by a range of different groups and individuals. The Club operates a community outreach programme for young people and has very successful youth and women's football teams. The Club is run, owned and controlled by a Members' Club.

The Club supports the Council's view on racism. At the next home match on 21 October 2006, the Club will be showing its support for the 'Kick Racism out of Football' campaign. Councillor Bramley stated that he would be showing the red card to racism and expected to see Councillor Steed present too.

Councillor Bramley referred to the Club's last successful cup run in the FA Trophy at which he and Councillors L Smith and Fairbrass went to see the Final, held in Stoke. The game was shown live on Sky, and although Dagenham and Redbridge lost that match, the team and its supporters were praised for the manner in which they conducted themselves, which in turn raised pride in the Borough.

Councillor Bramley explained that at the Cup Final, Dagenham and Redbridge's first goal was scored by Mark Stein, who was the club's record highest goal scorer with over 40 goals that season. Mark Stein's parents were asylum seekers. The second goal was scored by Tarkan Mustapha, who is of Turkish decent.

In response to the question raised, Councillor Bramley assured that there were seven directional signs around the Borough:

- New Road (A1306) to Ballards Road (B178)
- Ballards Road (B178) to Rainham Road South
- Rainham Road South pointing towards Victoria Road at the junction with Foxlands Crescent
- Wood Lane (A124) to Rainham Road North
- Whalebone Lane South at the junction of Wood Lane (A124)
- Eastern Avenue (A12) to Whalebone Lane North (A111)
- Rainham Road North outside Dagenham East Station

He referred to a letter received by the Club from the Football Association, commenting on how well signposted the club was. The Club duly thanked the Street Lighting Section in one of their match day programmes for the help given to the club.

Councillor Jarvis stated that he had received a number of complaints from the residents of Salisbury Road regarding a block of new flats located on the junction of Salisbury Road and Alton Mews. Having visited the development and spoken to residents, he noted that the building site has no protective fencing, many windows of the development have been smashed and it has become a magnet for local troublemakers, with drink, drugs and under age sex taking place. Although the Council has been made aware of the problem, he asked why the Council is failing to act and resolve this matter quickly.

Councillor Kallar explained that the Community Safety Team is aware of the issue and is working with the Safer Neighbourhood Team to support local residents to try to identify those responsible for crime and disorder in the area and to see what environmental improvements can be made to the area to reduce the opportunity for crime.

He stated that the Council is not aware of any complaints about this site from nearby residents but, at his request, officers have inspected the premises to establish the extent of the problem.

The site is privately owned and the building under construction is substantially complete. The building is secure. All the windows on the ground floor are boarded and there is no access to the inside. There is evidence of damage to the surface of the parking bays and some of the windows on the upper floor have been broken.

It is understood that works to complete the building have stopped because the developer has run out of money and cannot afford to get the services connected. The ownership of the site is uncertain and officers' attempts to contact the developer have received no response.

Efforts are being made to trace the owners to persuade them to secure the site until building works can be resumed. Unfortunately the Council has few powers to force landowners to carry out works to their site and if negotiations fail, the Council will need to consider action under the Town and Country Planning Act. However, this is a lengthy and costly legal process, which is challengeable in the courts and the Council needs to ensure that all other avenues to resolve the problem are explored first.

If Councillor Jarvis had spoken to his ward colleagues, he would have been told that the Police have been involved.

51. Appointment of Standards Committee Chair

Received a report seeking to appoint one of the two current 'independent members' of the Standards Committee as the new Chair and to appoint one of the councillor members as the Deputy Chair, in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

Agreed, in accordance with Article 8 of the Council's Constitution, to appoint Mrs Fiona Fairweather, as the Chair of the Standards Committee and Councillor N Gill as Deputy Chair.

52. Proposed Establishment of a Governance Working Group

Received a report proposing the establishment of a Governance Working Group to review the current constitutional arrangements in relation to the political structure and the related schemes of delegation to the Executive and scrutiny arrangements.

Agreed, in order to ensure that governance arrangements are appropriate, clear and provide for effective political leadership and engagement, to:

1. The establishment of a Governance Working Group, to commence in October 2006 and report back to the Assembly in January 2007;
2. Appoint the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the Executive and the Scrutiny management Board, Councillor Mrs Rush (Executive Member) and Councillor Barnbrook (minority representative) to the Governance Working Group; and
3. The terms of reference as set out in the report.

53. * Rehousing Grants

Councillor Fairbrass highlighted details of a leaflet being circulated stating that Westminster Council was offering families £100,000 to move to the Thames Gateway area. The details set out in the leaflet were not true.

He explained that he had contacted all London Boroughs and confirmed that Westminster Council do make a grant of £50,000 to existing tenants who give up a council property of 3 or more bedrooms. He noted that not one person taking up this offer from Westminster Council had purchased a property in Barking and Dagenham; one had moved to the United States of America and another to the Philippines.

Councillor Fairbrass stated that he hoped to see an end to the circulation of leaflets containing misinformation.

* Item considered as a matter of urgency with the consent of the Chair under Section 100B (4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 11 October 2006
(8:12 - 8:15 pm)

PRESENT

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

Councillor A Agrawal	Councillor J L Alexander
Councillor R W Bailey	Councillor Mrs S J Baillie
Councillor R J Barnbrook	Councillor G J Bramley
Councillor R J Buckley	Councillor Ms E Carpenter
Councillor S Carroll	Councillor H J Collins
Councillor J R Denyer	Councillor R W Doncaster
Councillor C J Fairbrass	Councillor M A R Fani
Councillor Mrs K J Flint	Councillor S S Gill
Councillor D Hemmett	Councillor Mrs D Hunt
Councillor J K Jarvis	Councillor S Kallar
Councillor Mrs C A Knight	Councillor Miss T A Lansdown
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 L A Reason
Councillor Mrs V M Rush	Councillor Miss N E Smith
Councillor J Steed	Councillor D A Tuffs
Councillor Mrs P A Twomey	Councillor G M Vincent
Councillor L R Waker	Councillor P T Waker
Councillor Mrs M M West	

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor N Connelly	Councillor Miss C L Doncaster
Councillor Mrs S A Doncaster	Councillor N S S Gill
Councillor I S Jamu	Councillor R C Little
Councillor Mrs J E Rawlinson	Councillor L Rustem
Councillor L A Smith	Councillor J R White

53. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest

54. Appointment of Honorary Alderman of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Received a report seeking approval to appoint former Councillor Frederick Jones as an Honorary Alderman for the Borough.

Frederick Jones had served as a Councillor for 42 years, and until the recent local election in May 2006, he was the longest serving current Member, having been elected to the Council in 1964. He was appointed Freeman of the Borough in 1985 and was Mayor for the municipal year 1990/1991.

During his time on the Council, Mr Jones was Chairman of the Libraries Committee, Vice-Chairman of the Education Committee and served on various committees, including General Purposes, Leisure and Amenities, Policy Advisory and the Dagenham Town Show. He also served on many external organisations, including the Barking Arts Council, Barking and Dagenham Voluntary Service Association, Barking and Dagenham Old Peoples Welfare, Barking and Gospel Oak Line Committee, Becontree Widows Club, Barking Operatic Society, Abbeyfield (Barking) Society, Cloud House (Abbeyfield Home) Management Committee and the Witten Association.

Agreed, to the appointment of Frederick Jones as an Honorary Alderman of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham in recognition of his outstanding service to the Council.



The Commission for
Local Administration in England

Tony Redmond
Local Government Ombudsman

Peter MacMahon
Deputy Ombudsman

21 June 2006

FIRST CLASS

Mr Rob Whiteman
Chief Executive
London Borough of Barking & Dagenham
Civic Centre
DAGENHAM
Essex RM10 7BN

Our ref: TR/JS
(Please quote our reference when contacting us)

**If telephoning please contact: Frank Edwards' Personal Assistant,
Candya Farmer, on 020 7217 4693. Or e-mail: c.farmer@lgo.org.uk**

Dear Mr Whiteman

Annual Letter 2005/06

I am writing to give you my reflections on the complaints received against your authority and dealt with by my office over the last year. I hope that in reviewing your own performance you will find this letter a useful addition to other information you hold highlighting how people experience or perceive your services.

This year we will publish all our annual letters on our website (www.lgo.org.uk) and share them with the Audit Commission. There is widespread support from authorities for us to do this. We will wait for four weeks after this letter before doing so, to give you an opportunity to consider the letter first. If a letter is found to contain any factual inaccuracy we will reissue it.

In addition to the narrative below there are two attachments which form an integral part of this letter: statistical data covering a three year period and a note to help the interpretation of the statistics.

Complaints received

I received 86 complaints about your Council during the year, a reduction both from last year's total of 103, and from the previous year's 133.

The most significant trend was a fall in Housing (not Housing Benefit) complaints from 60 to 42, which may represent a reduction in the problems experienced in the Council's 'Shape Up' programme.

/...

10th Floor Millbank Tower
Millbank London SW1P 4QP
Tel 020 7217 4620 Fax 020 7217 4621
DX 2376 Victoria 1
www.lgo.org.uk

Housing Benefit and Social Services complaints also fell. There were small increases in Highways and Education complaints. I note that there were no Planning complaints at all last year and only one in the year before (nationally such complaints account for 24% of the Ombudsman's work). This suggests to me that planning issues are dealt with effectively within your Council.

Decisions on complaints

I made decisions on 92 complaints in the year.

I returned 33 of these complaints (some 36% of the total) to your authority as 'premature' as I did not consider that you had had sufficient opportunity to deal with them through your own procedures.

Last year I returned 49 complaints (some 46% of the total) as 'premature'. I questioned whether the Council's complaints procedure could be better publicised. I am pleased to note the reduction in the number of complaints dealt with in this way (closer to the national average of 27%). I am aware that the Council has moved towards centralising its handling of first stage complaints through its call centre, and this may have contributed to this reduction.

Of the remaining 59 complaints, I found no maladministration in 14 and used my discretion to close a further 19. Seven complaints were outside my jurisdiction.

Reports and Local settlements

When we complete an investigation we must issue a report. There is a significant proportion of investigations that do not reach this stage. This is because we settle the complaint during the course of our investigation. We call these decisions 'local settlements'.

Last year I again issued no formal reports against your Council. I settled 19 complaints. This represented 32% of all decisions (excluding premature complaints), a substantial increase on last year's 17% and higher than the national average of 21%. I give below details of some of these settlements.

The largest single settlement was for a complaint that the Council had failed to follow its adult protection procedures, resulting in a family's visits to their elderly relative being observed, despite the fact that consent had not been obtained for this. In addition to the payment of compensation, the Council made a number of changes to its procedures and introduced a training programme for staff involved in adult protection issues.

/...

In a second complaint the Council agreed to install as a priority a level-access shower for a person with limited mobility. In response to this complaint, the Council also took immediate steps to amend its procedures to ensure that 'critical' care assessments are signed off at managerial levels and that interim measures are put in place following such assessments.

I settled seven complaints relating to housing repairs or improvements. Most of these complaints related to delay in carrying out works. Two of the complaints involved delay under the 'Shape Up' programme.

I settled two Education Admissions complaints. In one the Council agreed to offer a fresh appeal. In the second the Council agreed to provide clearer comments on the oversubscription criteria when the new admissions booklet for 2007 is printed.

I settled three complaints about Housing Benefit. Two cases involved delay; the Council agreed to write off an overpayment in one instance and pay compensation in the other. In the third case the Council failed to backdate a claim but, after the complaint was investigated, promptly agreed not to recover the repayment.

I settled one complaint about unclear wording on a parking permit. The Council has reviewed the parking arrangements in the area concerned and made changes to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.

Lastly, one complaint concerned poor maintenance, disrespect for visitors and other management failures at a Council cemetery. The Council responded helpfully to my enquiries by implementing changes to the management of the cemetery.

The Council paid a total of £1,660 compensation in local settlements.

Training in complaint handling

Our training in complaint handling is proving very popular with authorities and we continue to receive very positive feedback from participants. Over the last year we have delivered more than 100 courses from the range of three courses that we now offer as part of our role in promoting good administrative practice.

Effective Complaint Handling was the first course we developed, aimed at staff who deal with complaints as a significant part of their job. Since then we have introduced courses in complaint handling for front line staff and in handling social services complaints.

All courses are presented by an experienced investigator so participants benefit from their knowledge and expertise of complaint handling.

/...

I am pleased that we were able to provide the Council with an Effective Complaint Handling course in July 2005. I hope that those who attended the course found it useful.

I have enclosed some information on the range of courses available together with contact details for enquiries and any further bookings.

Liaison with LGO

Your average response time to my first enquiries was 21.6 days. This is an improvement on the previous year's average time of last year's 26.5 days and well within my requested timescale of 28 days. I am very grateful for that. Only four complaints were over the 28 day threshold and none of these substantially so.

I would also like to thank the Council for its helpful response earlier in the year when our office made a number of general enquiries on complaints. This occurred at a time when there was substantial backlog in complaints at our office, and I realise that this resulted in additional work for your officers. I am grateful for their assistance in responding to these enquiries and note that, despite this being additional pressure placed on them, your staff maintained its excellent response time to complaints.

Relations between our offices are effective. The Council's responses to my office are generally prompt and detailed, and accompanied by appropriate supporting paperwork. In the main arrangements for visiting your offices have also been helpful.

My investigators have noted the Council's willingness, in general, to respond constructively to settlement proposals and on a number of occasions to make its own proposals.

However, on occasions, such as in some of the housing repairs complaints, there has been a lack of clarity in some of the Council's earlier responses through its own procedure and a concern that some of the cases might have been settled at an earlier stage had compensation payments been made. This may partly account for the higher than average number of complaints referred to me which are subsequently settled.

The Assistant Ombudsman and one of my investigators had a useful meeting with your Complaints Unit in November 2005, at which your officers provided an update on developments in the Council's complaints system.

I understand that proposed changes to centralise the complaints system further and to provide input into complaints from the Complaints Unit at an earlier stage are under discussion. I welcome this proactive approach by the Council and will be interested to hear of the results of these changes once they are finalised.

/...

Conclusions/general observations

I welcome this opportunity to give you my reflections about the complaints my office has dealt with over the past year. I hope that you find the information and assessment provided useful when seeking improvements to your Council's services. I would again very much welcome any comments you may have on the form and content of the letter.

I would again be happy to consider requests for myself or a senior colleague to visit the Council to present and discuss the letter with councillors or staff. We will do our best to meet the requests within the limits of the resources available to us.

I am also arranging for a copy of this letter and its attachments to be sent to you electronically so that you can distribute it easily within the council and post it on your website should you decide to do this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony Redmond". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'T'.

Tony Redmond

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List of Motions

1. Development, Planning and Regeneration

To be moved by Councillor Barnbrook

“The Council and thus local people must have the last say in all matters in regard to development, planning and regeneration, without veto, and not other authoritative (*sic*) bodies.”

2. Flying of the Union Flag

To be moved by Councillor Rustem

“To help restore civic pride and embrace the values of citizenship and Britishness (*sic*) that the Union Flag should fly over all council buildings 12 months of the year.”

3. Covering of the face in public buildings

To be moved by Councillor R Bailey

“In the interest of safety and community integration that all items that fully cover the face should be banned from all public buildings. This includes crash helmets, ski masks and balaclavas, and all religious face coverings such as the burqa and niqab.

4. Collective Worship in Schools

To be moved by Councillor Buckley

“To improve integration and instil Christian values all maintained schools which have currently opted out of a daily act of collective worship should be (*sic*) made to reinstate them.”

5. Halal Meat in Schools

To be moved by Councillor Jarvis

“All Halal meat (*sic*) be banned from all schools within the borough because the process of slitting an animal’s throat and leaving it to bleed to death without it being stunned is barbaric.”

6. School Uniforms

To be moved by Councillor Tuffs

“To improve discipline and manners all schools should immediately reintroduce school uniforms. The introduction of school uniform would also reduce bullying related to clothing and difference.”

7. Maintenance and Replacement of fencing on Council Properties

To be moved by Councillor Mrs Knight

“That funds be set aside for the maintenance and replacement of fencing on all council properties front and back.”

8. Allocation of new Council Housing

To be moved by Councillor R Doncaster

“That all new council housing built in the Borough should be allocated to people that were born in the Borough or have lived continuously in the Borough for a period of not less than ten years.”

9. Metal Detectors in Schools

To be moved by Councillor Steed

“That all schools should have metal detectors and full time security contractors present through out the day to reduce knife crime and improve security and discipline.”

10. Canvassing by Unregistered Political Groups

To be moved by Councillor Miss Lansdown

“That all unregistered political groups that are not standing candidates in any elections should be banned from canvassing, leafleting and any other activities that may unduly influence the outcome of elections.”

11. St George’s Day

To be moved by Councillor Miss C Doncaster

“That St Georges Day, our national saint, be recognised by the Council and money set aside for set (*sic*) Georges Day celebrations.”

12. Singing of the National Anthem

To be moved by Councillor Mrs S Doncaster

“That to increase integration and improve citizenship all schools as part of their assembly should sing the National Anthem.”

Procedure for Motions on issues directly affecting the Borough

1. Motions must be delivered to the Chief Executive not later than 4.00pm on the Wednesday two weeks before the meeting.
2. They will be listed on the agenda in the order in which they are received
3. Motions must be about matters for which the Council has a responsibility or which directly affect the borough.
4. Amendments to motions should be presented in writing to the Chief Executive not later than 12 noon on the Friday before the meeting. Amendments proposed after this time may only be considered with the consent of the Chair.
5. A Member may alter or withdraw their motion or amendment at any time.
6. Order / rules of debate:
 - i) Except with the Chair's consent, the debate on each motion shall last no longer than 10 minutes and no speech shall exceed 2 minutes.
 - ii) The mover will move the motion and explain its purpose.
 - iii) The seconder will then second the motion.
 - iv) The Chair will then invite other Members to speak on the motion and put forward any amendments.
 - v) Once all Members who wish to speak have done so, or the time limit has elapsed, the Chair will allow the mover a right of reply.
 - vi) At the end of the debate, any amendments will be voted on in the order in which they were proposed.
 - vii) If an amendment is carried, the motion as amended becomes the substantive motion to which any further amendments are moved.
 - viii) After an amendment has been carried, the Chair will read out the amended motion before accepting any further amendments, or if there are none, put it to the vote.

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THE ASSEMBLY

6 DECEMBER 2006

REPORT OF THE LEASEHOLD MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

Title: Final Report of the Leasehold Management Scrutiny Panel	For Decision
<p>Summary:</p> <p>Final Reports of Scrutiny Panels are submitted to the following parts of the Political Structure as set out in Paragraph 11 of Article 5B of the Constitution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Scrutiny Management Board – for any advice or suggestions prior to finalisation and formal presentation to the Assembly (ii) The Executive – for consideration and, if necessary, response in a separate report or verbally to the Assembly (iii) The Assembly – for adoption of the report, its findings and recommendations <p>This report outlines the work of the Leasehold Management Scrutiny Panel, which included scrutiny of the Council's Leasehold Management function, particularly the Council's general relationship with leaseholders and our expectations of them, service charges, including billing and collection processes and leaseholders participation in consultation processes, visiting a London Borough and consultation with leaseholders.</p> <p>With regard to the Council's Home Ownership and Leasehold Service, the Scrutiny Panel concluded that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is scope for reviewing and improving the information given to leaseholders; • communication and consultation with leaseholders can be more effective; • appropriate Information Technology (IT) / data bases are required within the Service. <p>The Scrutiny Panel's recommendations are intended to develop both a better general relationship between the Council and leaseholders and a better understanding of the Council's and leaseholders' expectations of each other.</p> <p>Wards Affected: All</p>	
<p>Implications:</p> <p>Financial:</p> <p>Generally, there are minimal financial implications from this report as the recommendations mainly concern administrative and operational improvements. However, there are costs associated to an enhanced/improved I.T system. The Customer Services Department is planning to replace the current housing IT systems with a new comprehensive system, which would also include the functions applicable within the Home Ownership Service. Given the scale of this piece of work it is likely to take up to two years to procure a new system. All above costs will be contained within the existing budgets of the Housing Revenue Account.</p>	

<p>Legal: None</p> <p>Risk Management: None</p> <p>Social Inclusion and Diversity: None</p> <p>Crime and Disorder: None</p>		
<p>Recommendation(s)</p> <p>This Scrutiny Panel, on completion of its works, makes the following recommendations to the Assembly:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> to review the arrangements at London Borough of Greenwich, particularly in relation to the following and to implement into local practice where possible: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> information for leaseholders, written and verbal (appropriate specific details of the proposed documentation / information for leaseholders is set out in Appendix 2) contact with leaseholders – in person and by telephone information technology / data bases to ensure that when procuring a new IT system for Customer Services, the needs of the Homeownership and Leasehold Service and its customers are adequately specified. 		
<p>Reason:</p> <p>So that the needs of the Council's leaseholders are met by ensuring that their views are listened to and that adequate information is made available in a way that can be easily understood to Leaseholders.</p>		
<p>Contacts: Mrs J.E. Bruce (former Councillor)</p> <p>Kal Benning</p>	<p>Title: Lead Member</p> <p>Team Manager Democratic Services</p>	<p>Contact Details:</p> <p>Tel: 020 8227 2113 Fax: 020 8227 2171 E-mail: kalbinder.benning@lbbd.gov.uk</p>

1. Background

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Management Board (SMB) meeting on the 9 November 2005 considered a suggestion from the Corporate Management Team (CMT) that it might wish to consider looking more closely at the activities of the leasehold management work of the Council's Right to Buy Team, with a broad aim of improving the Council's relationship with the growing number of leaseholders in the Borough.

- 1.2 The SMB considered a number of areas of services provided to leaseholders by the Council's Right to Buy and Leasehold Management Sections within the former Housing Department. The SMB decided that it would be beneficial to proceed with a scrutiny of leasehold management.
- 1.3 The terms of reference for the panel and its membership were agreed by SMB at its meeting on 14 December 2005. A time frame of three months was set for the work of the panel, although this was extended as the panel had not completed its investigations. The panel met on three occasions, 9 February, 7 March and 13 March 2006.

2. Membership

- 2.1 Membership of the panel comprised:

Former Councillor Mrs J E Bruce (Lead Member)
Councillor K J Flint
Councillor D Hunt
Former Councillor T J Justice
Councillor Mrs J E Rawlinson

- 2.2 Beryl Mayles, Barking & Dagenham Leaseholders Association was the panel's external representative. However, she was substituted by Mr F. Button, also from the Association, as she was unable to attend panel meetings.
- 2.3 Danny Caine, Business Manager, Housing Services, Customer Services Department, was the Lead Service Officer.
- 2.4 Christine Shepherd, Head of Human Resources, Resources Department was the Independent Scrutiny Support Officer.

3. Terms of Reference

- 3.1 The terms of reference for the panel were:

1. to review the leasehold management function within the Customer Services Department with a particular emphasis on:
 - the Council's general relationship with leaseholders and our expectations of them
 - service charges, including the billing and collection processes, and how we prove value for money; and
 - leaseholders' participation in consultation processes.
2. in doing so have regard to best practice in leasehold management across other local authorities;
3. like all Scrutiny Panels, to consider any related equalities and diversity and health issues; and the scope for efficiency gains.

4. The Work of the Panel

4.1 The work of the panel comprised of three main exercises:

- scrutiny of the current arrangements of the Council's Leasehold Management function
- visiting the London Borough of Greenwich as one of the best reforming authorities in London for leasehold management,
- consultation with leaseholders.

4.2 The findings of each exercise are set at below.

5. The Council's Home Ownership and Leasehold Service

5.1 The Council has some 3000 leaseholders living in accommodation sold either to the occupant or re-sold to another occupier or bought to let. This accounts for 14% of the Council housing stock, and for the period 2004/05, £2.5 million was raised through service charge bills. Leaseholders now account for 60% of all sales completed and this compares to 50% in 2003/04. In 2004 the Right to Buy team expanded its services to leaseholders by creating and appointing to the post of Leasehold Service Manager.

5.2 A number of new initiatives have taken place to improve the flow of information to leaseholders, however, unfortunately and all too often the Council's relationship with leaseholders is difficult, particularly around service charges and contributions to major works schemes. Whilst the vast majority of leaseholders are happy to comply as long as they receive value for money services a significant minority seek to challenge every service charge bill and capital works estimate they may receive.

5.3 In many cases there is no cost to the leaseholder in challenging an account and officers are anxious to rectify genuine complaints and concerns. However, a great deal of officer time is invested in proving costs for invoices or responding to challenges on tendering and procurement processes that appear, on occasion, to be submitted because they can be, rather than on the basis of any stated tangible concern.

5.4 The information that is provided to leaseholders by the Council in relation to how the service charge bill has been arrived at could be improved and better information at this stage would undoubtedly save time at a later date in relation to dealing with enquiries.

5.5 There are various forms of communication with leaseholders for example:

- representation on a Community Housing Partnership (CHP) Board
- newsletters
- consultation on major works
- leaseholder conference held annually

However, there is scope for improvement, particularly in relation to the written information and guidance that is provided by the Council.

6. Best Practice visit to London Borough of Greenwich

- 6.1. To learn from good practice the scrutiny panel agreed to a visit to a good performing authority. The London Borough of Greenwich (LB Greenwich) was considered a good option as it had recently attained 2 stars following an Audit Commission inspection.
- 6.2 The visit took place on 7 March 2006 and comprised former Councillor Mrs Bruce (Lead Member), Councillor Mrs Flint and former Councillor Justice and Mr. F. Button, external representative, Danny Caine and Richard Kober, Customer Services Department were also in attendance. Members and Officers focused on the homeownership arrangements at Greenwich and the relationship with leaseholders.
- 6.3 Approximately 4 years ago the Home Ownership Service at LB Greenwich was inspected and received a 0 star (poor) rating from the Audit Commission. As a result of this assessment, the team was faced with a re-inspection. At the time of the original inspection the team had 14 staff providing the Service and a business case was put in place to achieve improvements in the Service and it was re-inspected and assessed as 2 stars. It has also recently been awarded a Charter Mark (the Government's national standard for excellence in customer service).
- 6.4 Like Barking and Dagenham, LB Greenwich has also seen a reduction in the number of freehold right to buy applications and this has been linked to the increase in property values and the cap applied to Right to Buy (RTB) discount. However, there has been increased activity in assignments of leases with approximately 400 per year. A majority of these assignments are seeing people coming from the private sector and as such they don't view the Council as their landlord. The London Borough of Greenwich has approximately 4000 leasehold properties, this compares to almost 3000 in Barking and Dagenham. The average leasehold bill there is £569 with the most expensive being £1,700 this compares to a local average of £450.
- 6.5 Following the initial Audit Commission report, LB Greenwich restructured its Home Ownership Team which resulted in the setting up 5 teams with 5 Managers and staff totalling 32. Barking and Dagenham's Home Ownership Team has 8 staff.
- 6.6 In terms of LB Greenwich's relationship with leaseholders, in the past there were problems with the information provided to leaseholders; incomprehensible bills and a limited information database meant that they didn't know how many leaseholders they had due to the way that the services were fragmented.
- 6.7 They also acknowledged that different types of leaseholders have different issues. For example, those living on large estates had different issues of concern to those living in a converted house; they felt that they had to get to know the leaseholders and build better relationships and they did this through creating partnerships with councillors, staff and the leaseholders. They now have a leaseholder forum which meets quarterly.
- 6.8 LB Greenwich has a more sophisticated mechanism than Barking and Dagenham for communicating with its leaseholders. They provide high quality information packs; service charge bills are clear and understandable which have reduced the number of enquires/complaints. They also have good relationships with other

council departments, which ensures that when they raise a charge for a service, they can be certain that the service is being provided e.g. cleaning/ caretaking.

6.9 The Scrutiny Panel concluded the visit as follows:

- LB Greenwich provides an extensive service through its Home Ownership Service; its relationship with leaseholders is good and excellent levels of information are available through a wide range of leaflets and handbooks
- LB Greenwich has excellent service charge collection rates and has a sophisticated information database on their clients. The billing process is clear and easily understandable which has resulted in the reduction of complaints.
- In terms of value for money, the average service charges in LB Greenwich are 25% higher than those in Barking and Dagenham. Also whilst LB Greenwich has approximately 30% more leasehold properties than Barking and Dagenham, their Home Ownership Team has 4 times as many staff.

7. Consultation with Leaseholders

7.1 At the meeting on 13 March 2006, the panel agreed that a member (Councillor) of the Scrutiny Panel would carry out a consultation with leaseholders to gauge their satisfaction with the services.

7.2 Thirty leaseholders across the Borough were contacted to see if they were willing to take part in this, of which five welcomed this.

7.3 Councillor Mrs Flint undertook a telephone consultative exercise mainly concerning the following questions:

- Did you purchase your flat from the Council?
- When you purchased your flat, were you informed of your rights and responsibilities?
- Do you remember receiving a copy of the "Leasehold Newsletter"?
- If you did was the information it contains useful/helpful?
- What articles/topics would like to see in the Newsletter?
- How do you feel about the way the Council manages your property?
- What would you like the Council to do to improve the Service for you?

7.4 The outcome of the consultation exercise is set out in Appendix 1.

8. Equalities and Diversity

8.1 The Scrutiny Panel considered any related equalities and diversity issues throughout its investigation.

8.2 The Scrutiny Panel found that the translation of documents needs to be considered and addressed by the Home Ownership and Leasehold Service.

9. Progress made to date

9.1 The Scrutiny Panel was particularly mindful of reviewing the arrangements at L.B. Greenwich, particularly in relation to the following and for officers to consider implementing these into local practice, where possible; particularly as they were mainly administrative and operational with minimal financial applications:

- information for leaseholders, written and verbal
- contact with leaseholders – in person and by telephone
- information technology/ databases

9.2 In view of the above, the following have been achieved / established to date:

- extensive amounts of documentation, leaflets, information packs and practices obtained from LB Greenwich have been reviewed against the operations in Barking and Dagenham and the established for the Council.
- local leaseholders would benefit from an information pack along similar lines to that provided by LB Greenwich.
- the Council should publicise service charge payment methods
- the Council should develop a leaflet explaining how we bill leaseholders
- the Council develops a leaflet explaining how service charges are calculated
- in relation to equality and diversity issues, translations of documents needs addressing
- the Council should produce an annual report for leaseholders
- the Council should support the development of a leaseholder group/ forum

Attached at Appendix 2 is an action plan with timescales and financial implications for addressing these arrangements.

9.3 Officers from the Home Ownership Team have met a representative of Barking and Dagenham Leaseholders' Association with a view to supporting the development of a leaseholder group/forum. The meeting was productive and the actions from this meeting are reflected in Appendix 2.

9.4 In terms of information technology and databases, the Homeownership Team within the Council use a number of IT systems to support the work:

- the mainframe system to support the Right to Buy process
- ORACLE as part of the Council's financial management system: and
- excel spread sheets to estimate/calculate reserve fund contributions

9.5 The IT system within the Home Ownership Team would benefit from enhancements and improvements. However, there are high costs associated with updating/ improving IT systems. The Customer Services Department is planning to replace the current housing IT systems with a new comprehensive system, which would also include the functions of the Home Ownership Service. Given the scale of this piece of work, it is likely to take up to two years to procure a new system.

9.6 The Home Ownership Team will scope out their requirements to ensure that when the specification for the new housing IT system is developed the needs of the team and the customers will be met.

10. Consultees

10.1 The following were consulted in the preparation of this report:

- Members of the Leaseholders Management Scrutiny Panel
- The Corporate Management Team
- Danny Caine, Business Manager, Housing Services, Customer Services Department
- Jim Ripley, Divisional Director of Housing Services, Customer Services Department
- Beryl Males and Fred Button, Barking & Dagenham Leaseholders' Association
- Christine Shepherd, Head of Human Resources, Resources Department
- Nina Clark, Assistant Chief Executive (Democracy & Partnerships).

FEEDBACK FROM FIVE LEASEHOLDERS WHO HAD WELCOMED CONTACT FROM A MEMBER (COUNCILLOR) OF THE LEASEHOLD MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

Two had purchased from the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham Direct and two had purchased privately

Most had lived in a property for 7 to 8 years.

One Leaseholder could not be contacted at times stated and the consultation process was aborted.

All informed of their rights and responsibilities

All received a copy of the Leaseholder Newsletter

All Leaseholders consulted were fairly happy with the way the Council manages the property although for two there were a few hiccups which were eventually sorted.
Concerns

Parents with children were concerned about vandalism of digital locks in the blocks and having to pay as well for this?

Value for money for service charges

Thames Accord who do not finish jobs

Leaseholder meeting – too short notice given

No invoices received for works carried out to block

Works planned – new roof has not materialised

Having to query bills etc

Outside of homes not being decorated every 7 years

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ACTION PLAN FOR THE LEASEHOLD MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY PANEL

Recommendation	Responsibility for Implementation	Deadline for Implementation	Estimate of Cost	How projects will be monitored
Develop Leaseholder Information Pack	R. Kober	October 2006	£3,000 (includes printing charges)	More informed leaseholders Reduction leasehold bill complaints
Publicise payment methods through the next Leaseholders Newsletter	R. Kober	September 2006	Within existing budget	Increased revenue
Produce leaflet explaining the leasehold bill	R. Kober	September 2006	£1000 (includes printing charges)	Reduction leasehold bill complaints
Produce leaflet explaining how service charges are calculated	R. Kober	September 2006	£100 (includes printing charges)	More informed leaseholders Reduction leasehold bill complaints
Review printed documents to ensure clarity of terms and language	R. Kober	September 2006	Within existing budget	Increase in knowledge on the part of the customer
Leaseholder Conference	R. Kober	October 2006	Within existing budget	Publicise the leasehold service Forum for leaseholders to share their views

Recommendation	Responsibility for Implementation	Deadline for Implementation	Estimate of Cost	How projects will be monitored
<p>Supporting Barking & Dagenham Leaseholders' Association (BDLA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An article in the Leaseholder Newsletter • Distribution of BDLA information / literature to leaseholders • Establishing regular meetings with council officers to discuss issues of concern and opportunities to improve the service to leaseholders • Establish leaseholders focus group <p>Scope out IT requirements</p>	<p>R. Kober</p>	<p>August 2006</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>July and ongoing</p> <p>August and ongoing</p>	<p>Within existing budget</p>	<p>Raise awareness of BDLA</p> <p>Raise awareness of BDLA</p> <p>Improve relationship with council and leaseholders</p> <p>Greater involvement of customers in service provision</p> <p>Improvements on consultative process</p> <p>IT specification</p>
	<p>R.Kober</p>	<p>August 2006</p>	<p>Departmental resources, however, amount unknown to date</p>	