

ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 9 January 2008
(7:00 - 7:50 pm)

PRESENT

Councillor S S Gill (Chair)
Councillor J R White (Deputy Chair)

Councillor A Agrawal	Councillor J L Alexander
Councillor R W Bailey	Councillor Mrs S J Baillie
Councillor R J Barnbrook	Councillor W F L Barns
Councillor G J Bramley	Councillor R J Buckley
Councillor Ms E Carpenter	Councillor S Carroll
Councillor H J Collins	Councillor J Davis
Councillor J R Denyer	Councillor C J Fairbrass
Councillor M A R Fani	Councillor Mrs K J Flint
Councillor N S S Gill	Councillor D Hemmett
Councillor Mrs D Hunt	Councillor I S Jamu
Councillor S Kallar	Councillor Mrs C A Knight
Councillor M A McCarthy	Councillor Mrs P A Northover
Councillor E O Obasohan	Councillor B Poulton
Councillor Mrs V 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 Mrs M M West

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor N Connelly	Councillor Miss C L Doncaster
Councillor R W Doncaster	Councillor Mrs S A Doncaster
Councillor J K Jarvis	Councillor Miss T A Lansdown
Councillor R C Little	Councillor J E McDermott
Councillor M E McKenzie	Councillor W W Northover
Councillor Mrs J E Rawlinson	Councillor Mrs L A Reason
Councillor J Steed	

71. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

72. Congratulations to Councillor Sydney Kallar, MBE

On behalf of the Assembly the Leader of the Council congratulated Councillor Kallar on being awarded the MBE. Councillor Fairbrass highlighted the fact that Councillor Kallar has been involved in public life since he was 14 years old, having been at the battle of Cable Street in 1936 and serving in the Second World War, and he took up his position with the Council at the age of 70, some 17 years ago. Councillor Fairbrass also said he felt it was right to remember Councillor Kallar's wife, Jane, for her support to

Councillor Kallar during his service with the Council and send her the Council's best wishes.

73. Minutes (5 December 2007)

Agreed.

74. Petition: Re-opening of the Gates to the Alleyways at Valence Circus

Received a report setting out actions taken to address the concerns of petitioners from two petitions relating to the closure of the alleyways in Valence Circus and the issues this had raised with regard to difficulties around access for some elderly and disabled residents.

Members queried the number of keys to be issued to residents to gain access to the alleyways and raised concerns about adequate lighting in the alleyways, which the Corporate Director of Adult and Community Services confirmed officers would be happy to investigate.

Agreed:

In order to achieve a balanced approach to crime reduction and the needs of residents for access, that

- officers should take the necessary steps to implement the use of a Gating Order under the Highways Act to restrict the unfettered use of the right of way; and
- provide suitable alternative access arrangements for the community affected.

75. Customer Service Presentation - Children's Services Department

Received a presentation from Christine Pryor, Head of Integrated Family Services, on customer service issues within her division. There are five inter-linking strands to the service, which works across agencies to deliver seamless services for children aged 0-19 and their families, namely:

- Children's Centres
- Extended schools
- Parental Support
- Early Years and Childcare
- Engagement

Information was provided about each of the above areas, together with the results of satisfaction with childcare and engagement with children and young people surveys.

Members asked a number of questions relating to how the Children's Centres were publicised, the take up of places and the opening times.

Christine Pryor responded that the centres are open for 50 weeks of the year, from 8.00 am until 6.00 pm, but they are looking at the possibilities of making the opening times more flexible, including weekend working. With regard to publicity, one of the benefits of the centres being located on school sites has been that they have been able to work closely with the schools, health visitors and have provided literature to health centres,

libraries and local shops. In an effort to improve on this they are also working with the Council's corporate communications team to publicise the centres. In terms of take up, this has been very good.

In response to a query as to when there would be a Children's Centre in Alibon Ward, it was confirmed that Alibon, together with Valence and Longbridge Wards, would be targeted in the next phase of the programme.

It was noted from the children and young people's survey that 53% of young people in the borough said they hoped to continue studying and go to university, which the Leader of the Council said was a great improvement and was to be encouraged.

The Chair thanked Christine Pryor for her presentation.

76. London Member Development Charter

Received a report from the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development seeking approval to take the first steps towards obtaining a London Member Development Charter for Barking and Dagenham. This is a statement of the Council's commitment to developing and supporting its elected councillors.

Agreed to work towards obtaining the London Member Development Charter for Barking and Dagenham.

77. Report of the Executive - recent business

In order to comply with statute and assist in the calculation of the Authority's Council Tax for 2008/09, **agreed**:

- (i) In accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, that the amount calculated by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham as its Tax Base for the year 2008/09 shall be 51,429.5 Band D properties;
- (ii) That the discounts for second homes and short term empty properties are reduced from the current 50% to a 10% discount from 2008/09 onwards;
- (iii) That the discounts for long term empty properties are reduced from the current 50% discount to a 10% discount from 2008/09 onwards; and
- (iv) That no locally determined discounts based on categories of property or occupier be awarded for 2008/09.

78. Appointments

There were no appointments.

79. Motion

Translation of Council documents

Moved by Councillor Bailey and seconded by Councillor Barnbrook:

“It has been worked out that a council could translate council documents into over 70 languages, indeed some councils do this. This can easily cost councils over £1,000,000 per annum. Councils also employ interpreters and latest government research shows that they are very expensive with some costing over £20 per hour to use. Government research also shows that rather than encouraging migrants to speak and learn English all these political correct strategies actually discourage migrants from learning English. I would like to move the motion that from this evening the council will stop printing council documents in any other language except English and the council stops using interpreters forthwith. To continue with these practices is a complete waste of money.”

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Fairbrass and seconded by Councillor Liam Smith:

“This Council notes the motion and will consider the advice recently issued by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears, although the Council has already reduced its expenditure on translation by approximately 50%.”

Councillor Fairbrass said that this Council is not concerned with the national spend. He said the motion grossly overstates the issue as it relates to Barking and Dagenham: expenditure on translation and interpreting in this borough is not anywhere near £1m. The Council’s total expenditure for 2006/7 is £49,539 both for translation and interpretation. This equates to approximately 28.4p per local resident per year and he added that personally he does not mind spending about 1/2p a week on this service.

Councillor Fairbrass went on to say that Council policy is already closely aligned with recent guidance issued by Hazel Blears, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and officers are taking the opportunity to review the Council’s policy in light of this and will be issuing guidance for all staff in the near future.

Councillor Barnbrook raised issues about children learning English in schools, saying that it does not assist all pupils if children are being taught English in class, and that the impact of translation cuts the actual lesson time down from 40 to 25 minutes. He said that children should be required to speak the English Language before they come into schools. However, Councillor Liam Smith responded that in Dagenham Park Community School, where 26 languages are spoken, English is taught outside normal school hours and classes are not disrupted.

The Chief Executive flagged up that the expenditure of £49,539 quoted by the Leader of the Council also includes signage and Braille, which helps disabled people gain access to services.

In conclusion, Councillor Bailey highlighted the fact that the Rt Reverend Dr Michael Nazir-Ali, Bishop of Rochester, had recently spoken about no go areas in Britain and said that by encouraging interpreting and translation services we are actually creating more no go areas, so the first thing children should be learning in schools is English.

Following the debate the amendment was put to the vote and by a majority was **agreed**.

Agreed that this Council notes the motion and will consider the advice recently issued by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears, although the Council has already reduced its expenditure on translation by approximately 50%.

80. Leader's Question Time

Question from Councillor Robert Bailey

"I would like to ask the Leader of the Council, in view of recent local government research which shows that 'local councils are perceived to be like old boys clubs and closed shops composed of white males who are retired and sixty plus and in the majority of cases unrepresentative of the community', what is the council going to do to encourage younger and more intelligent people to put themselves forward for election or is he happy with the undemocratic and unrepresentative status quo."

Response from Councillor Fairbrass

"This Council does not fit that perception. The majority party's councillors fall into the following groups: 50% white males, 31.57% female, 18.42% minority ethnic, and 42.10 % are below 60 years of age. All stood for election, all were opposed and all were elected. That is democracy and they are a representative cross section of the residents of this borough.

The inference that anyone over 60 is less intelligent than someone younger may be regarded by some as an insult to over 26,000 retired residents of this Borough, which I believe includes two of the opposition party. Youth does not automatically confer wisdom but age builds experience and intelligence.

We are already working with our colleagues in other London Councils to promote the role of local councillors and thus improve recruitment. I would suggest a bit more reading and research by the questioner and I would refer him to the London Councils web site and to the report of the Councillors Commission 'Representing the Future', which contains 61 recommendations on how to recruit and retain competent councillors.

One final observation, my colleague Sid Kallar, MBE, joined this council at the age of 70 and at the age of 87 his considerable contribution to his community has been recognised by Her Majesty."

81. General Question Time

A number of questions submitted by minority party Members were withdrawn as the Members were absent from the meeting due to illness.

Question from Councillor Robert Bailey

"Why after all this time and all the promises have we not got wheelie bins yet and when are we going to get them?"

Response from Councillor Fairbrass (in the absence of the Lead Member for the environment and sustainability)

"This question has been answered previously and the answer remains the same.

The Waste Strategy, which was agreed in May 2006, clearly described how the council will decide if we want to have wheelie bins. I can only assume the Member has still not read the strategy so he will be sent another copy.

If we do what is suggested and simply dump wheelie bins on our residents, without proper consultation and advice, we will increase the amount of rubbish we collect which will increase the tax we pay for landfill thus increasing Council Tax.

The scheme that we will bring forward has been properly researched and planned and will not only make it easier for our residents to recycle and improve the cleanliness of the streets but actually reduce waste, which is better for the environment and saves the money that we can reinvest in other areas that are important to our community.”

Question from Councillor Richard Barnbrook

“How many Council dwellings have been allocated to asylum seekers this year? What is the cost to the Housing Revenue account and budget? How many asylum seekers have been referred for Housing Association accommodation this year?”

Response from Councillor Liam Smith

“The answer to this question is still the same as the last time I answered it, ie none because the responsibility for housing asylum seekers was passed to NASS (the National Asylum Seeker Service) in April 2000. Consequently there has been no cost to the Housing Revenue Account this year and no asylum seeker cases have been nominated to Registered Social Landlords by the Council.”