

ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 21 July 2010
(7:00 - 8:12 pm)

PRESENT

Councillor M Hussain (Chair)

Councillor S Alasia	Councillor J L Alexander
Councillor S Ashraf	Councillor R Baldwin
Councillor L Butt	Councillor E Carpenter
Councillor J Channer	Councillor J Clee
Councillor R Douglas	Councillor C Geddes
Councillor N S S Gill	Councillor R Gill
Councillor D Hunt	Councillor A S Jamu
Councillor I S Jamu	Councillor E Kangethe
Councillor E Keller	Councillor G Letchford
Councillor M A McCarthy	Councillor J E McDermott
Councillor M McKenzie MBE	Councillor D S Miles
Councillor M Mullane	Councillor E O Obasohan
Councillor J Ogungbose	Councillor T Perry
Councillor B Poulton	Councillor H S Rai
Councillor A K Ramsay	Councillor L A Reason
Councillor C Rice	Councillor L Rice
Councillor D Rodwell	Councillor T Saeed
Councillor A Salam	Councillor L A Smith
Councillor S Tarry	Councillor D Twomey
Councillor G M Vincent	Councillor J Wade
Councillor L R Waker	Councillor P T Waker
Councillor J R White	Councillor M M Worby

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor J Davis (Deputy Chair)	Councillor A Gafoor Aziz
Councillor G Barratt	Councillor P Burgon

8. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest

9. Minutes (19 May 2010)

Agreed.

10. Appointments

Agreed to appoint:

- (1) Councillors Channer and NSS Gill as trustees of Barking General Charities;

- and
- (2) Councillors NSS Gill and Kangethe as trustees of Barking and Ilford United Charities

It was **noted** that:

- (a) Councillor Couling will continue to be a member of the Children's Services Select Committee; and
- (b) Councillor Vincent has appointed Councillor Ogungbose as one of his deputies on the London Council's Transport and Environment Committee.

11. Response to Petition - Communal Digital / Satellite TV System

The lead petitioner, Mr K Rutter, presented the terms of a petition opposing the provision by the Council of communal TV aerial systems to tenants and leaseholders.

Mr Rutter advised that he had raised this petition after finding strangers in his garden with their equipment in his drive and an aerial being attached to his property. On questioning them, he stated that they were rude and told him they had been given permission to place the aerials wherever they wanted to.

Whilst having received in excess of 10 pages of information justifying the council's position, Mr Rutter felt that the council had been less thorough in dealing with the tenants' and leaseholders' concerns.

Mr Rutter further raised concerns as to the manner in which the council consulted with tenants and leaseholders by letter and the fact that the council took non-responses to the letter to amount to consent to the work proceeding, stating that non-responses could have been as a result of hospitalisation of the addressee or non-receipt of the letter.

Other points raised by Mr Rutter related to:

- poor maintenance of the aerials
- poor reception
- lack of consultation on the part of the contractors
- having to pay for an additional service in tandem with services that tenants had privately arranged.

Having regard to time restraints, Mr Rutter requested a meeting with the relevant officers to discuss these issues further.

The Group Manager, Landlord Services West introduced the report stating that it was important to note that government would be switching the whole of the UK's TV transmission to Digital TV by 2012, and that as a responsible landlord the council had decided to take the steps referred to in the report to ensure that residents would not be disadvantaged at the time of the switchover.

It was noted that Frances Kneller, Head of Housing and Property, Digital UK, was in attendance and available to answer questions on the government's agenda for the digital switchover and as to the responsibilities of landlords.

Councillor Worby gave her support to some of the issues raised by the petitioners, stating that in her opinion:

- how the contract has been administered has not been fully addressed in the report;
- the reason for these installations appears not to have been explained fully to the people affected;
- there seemed to have been no notification to them when the work was going to be carried out - people were returning to their homes to find that holes had been drilled in the walls;
- there appears to be no logic as to where the aerials have been placed, with individuals concerned as to why their property has had an aerial placed on it, whereas others did not.

Councillor Worby moved that this petition be referred to the relevant Select Committee to give leaseholders an opportunity for their concerns to be heard.

Councillor Hunt agreed totally with Councillor Worby, stating that she has received many enquiries from residents about the aerials. She further stated that from personal experience, she has found that it is difficult to contact the contractors to fix the aerial if the TV is not working properly.

Councillor L Waker concurred with both councillors, but also agreed that in his opinion it would be better to have one central aerial.

Councillor Channer also raised concerns as to how the residents were consulted.

Councillor P Waker, Cabinet Member for Housing, stated that the reason the contract was entered into six years ago was to avoid tenants ending up with no TV reception following the digital switchover. He agreed that if there were problems with the aerials, they have to be fixed. He also went on to state that whilst not wanting a confrontation with tenants, there should only be one aerial on each building and not individual satellite dishes for each tenant.

Councillor P Waker further stated that;

1. he was given to understand that this contract was cheaper than other boroughs were paying;
2. he would be happy to meet with Housing officers;
3. he was keen to look at what the cost of servicing the aerials is, as it may well be that in the future the council may be able to move to a lesser service charge or to no charge;
4. when this current contract comes to an end, there may be an opportunity to look at other options.

However, he agreed with Councillor Worby that this matter be referred to a Select Committee and expressed his thanks to the petitioners for their efforts in raising the petition.

Councillor Smith seconded Councillor Worby's recommendation to refer this matter to a Select Committee and asked the Assembly to support this action.

Agreed to refer the petition to the appropriate Select Committee.

12. Council Constitution

Received and noted this report presented by the Divisional Director for Legal and Democratic Services (DDLDS).

Responding to a question from Councillor Carpenter as to why the Local Housing Company had been deleted, the DDLDS advised that it currently does not exist.

The Leader of the Council concurred with this and suggested that if she wishes to, Councillor Carpenter should personally lobby government.

In response to a query regarding the petition procedure, the DDLDS advised that there is no legal requirement for the number of petitioners to be increased from 100 to 250 and it could remain at 100 households.

Agreed:

1. with immediate effect the proposed changes to the Council Constitution subject to the number of signatories to a petition remaining at 100 households (as referred to in paragraph 18 of Article 2 and paragraph 2 of Article 5C of Part B); and
2. the statutory Designated Scrutiny Officer role be assigned to the post of Scrutiny Team Manager.

13. Return of Planning Powers from London Thames Gateway Development Corporation (LTGDC) to LBBD

Received and noted this report introduced by Councillor McCarthy, Cabinet Member for Regeneration.

Councillors welcomed the move to return planning powers from London Thames Gateway Development Corporation to the Council. Councillor L Waker stated that in his opinion a step in the right direction would be for the Council to have a plan and a vision for the land.

The Planning Advisory Services' offer to provide tailored training to Members of the Development Control Board was also noted.

Agreed to support the return of planning powers from London Thames Gateway Development Corporation to the Council.

14. Local Development Framework - Adoption of Core Strategy Development Plan Document

Received and noted this report introduced by Councillor McCarthy, Cabinet Member for Regeneration.

In response to Councillor Carpenter's concern that the Independent Inspector had recommended the deletion of the affordable housing policy, Councillor Smith stated that the Council's policy is to support council housing, to move people out of tower blocks and into houses and to ensure that the Council's Local Development Framework supports the difficulties faced by residents at this time.

Agreed to adopt the Barking and Dagenham Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document.

**15. Local Development Framework: Supplementary Planning Document
"Saturation Point: Addressing the Health Impacts of Hot Food Takeaways"**

Received and noted this report introduced by Councillor McCarthy, Cabinet Member for Regeneration.

Members commended the report and congratulated Councillor McCarthy and officers for bringing it to the Assembly.

Referring to page 120 of the Agenda and the fixed fee charge of £1,000 to be sought through a Section 106 Agreement where hot food takeaways are deemed appropriate, Members requested that the outcomes of this be reviewed and reported back to the Assembly at a future date.

Agreed to adopt the "Saturation Point – Addressing the Health Impacts of Hot Food Takeaways" Supplementary Planning Document.

16. Treasury Management Annual Report 2009/10 and Amendments to the Treasury Management Strategy

Received and noted the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2009/10 introduced by the Corporate Financial Controller.

Agreed to approve revisions to the Council's Treasury Management Strategy to incorporate:

- (a) the new Minimum Revenue Provision Policy as set out in paragraph 7.1 of the report; and
- (b) provisions for the Council to make loans to external organisations in order to deliver continued value for money, in line with the powers vested in local authorities under Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000, as referred to in paragraph 10 of the report.

17. Motions

None received.

18. Leader's Question Time

Question from Councillor Ramsay:

"As one of the Members of the Council representing Victoria Road and in the light of the phenomenal progress made by Dagenham & Redbridge Football Club with the club's promotion last season to League 1, when just 3 seasons previously the Team was playing non-league football, I would like to ask the Leader if he would consider some recognition for the club's manager, John Still.

John has managed the team continuously since 2004, having also served as the founding manager of the amalgamated club. He is currently the fifth longest serving manager in the whole football league system. John also had a playing career, including a period when he played for Dagenham Football Club.

I feel, and many of my colleagues share my view, that his extraordinary contribution both to on the field football management and the part the club plays in the wider life of the community, requires some recognition from the Borough he has served and I would ask that the Leader considers the best way of recognising John's achievements."

Response from Councillor Smith:

"It is a welcome change to congratulate someone, and Councillor Ramsay, you have said it all. In 1985 I first went to watch them and I still have to pinch myself when I think about where we are today. If someone had told me back then that we would be in League One ...

It has been a tremendous effort from everyone at Dagenham & Redbridge FC. I have only ever met John Still twice and on one of those occasions he was sweeping the changing rooms.

I would say that what John Still has achieved has been done on a very limited budget.

The players are all ordinary people – they walk down the same streets as you and me and this coming season they will be playing against teams like Charlton and Sheffield Wednesday.

I would like to go away and speak with other colleagues to see what would be the best way of dealing with this. Managers come and go but John Still is still here. I am sure we will come back with a way of recognising John's achievements."

19. General Question Time**Question from Councillor Twomey:**

"In light of the new London Housing Allowance (LHA) reduction implemented by the coalition government limiting payments to a maximum of £400 for a 4 bedroom property, how do we as a borough propose to deal with the inevitable increase in tenants arriving from other boroughs looking for cheaper rents?

Westminster and Hackney in particular have over 6,000 properties that will be adversely affected by the LHA cap compared to approximately 5 properties in

Barking & Dagenham. What proposals will be put forward to combat this problem, ensuring that Barking & Dagenham is not flooded with tenants from other boroughs, particularly those homeless families from these boroughs who have been placed in private sector accommodation? "

Response from Councillor P Waker, Cabinet Member for Housing:

"I would like to thank Councillor Twomey for raising this important question. You may have noted that the Leader had a press release put out very quickly after the announcement and shortly after that I did an interview with Time FM about the dangers of the Housing Benefit cap for the Borough.

Partly because Barking & Dagenham has the lowest average income per household in London and therefore lower than average property prices, we are often highlighted more than most of the Outer London Boroughs that are in a similar position.

Essentially this is the latest development in the private renting nightmare that this country is now in, with high private rents that cost the taxpayer shed-loads of money in Housing Benefit.

The lack of Council house building over many years is the big factor and the real cause of the problem and I will return to this point in a minute.

The so called progressive Conservatism, as apparently practised by this Tory Government, and supported by the always Tory Liberal Democrats has decided to try to tackle the Housing Benefit burden. This is totally understandable, but typically they have merely tackled one of its symptoms – but none of its causes.

To use a phrase, they have been hard on a symptom of Housing Benefit costs, but soft on its causes.

A cap on Housing Benefit of £400 for bigger houses means that those on Housing Benefit in Inner London and areas such as Hackney and Tower Hamlets will no longer be able to pay their current rents.

So rather than be homeless they will move to areas with cheaper private sector rents.

Now, one theory is that the rents in Inner London will become cheaper and the taxpayer will not have to pay out such outrageous sums of money to, in my words, greedy grasping private landlords.

That to me would be a nice thought, but the problem with this theory, is that Inner London is the one area where wealthy people from across Britain and indeed from across the world are both willing and able to pay higher rents so as to be in or near to the centre of London.

So, while there might be, and I stress might be, a small fall in the level of private rents, the reality is that they are unlikely to fall by very much and certainly not to the level of the cap and therefore by enough to make rents more affordable in the Inner London area. To show the size of the problem the Inner London average 4

bedroom rent is around £1,000 per week at the moment, £600 per week above the new cap.

And when I say more affordable, by the way, for most people in ordinary jobs even the more reasonable private rent level of say £1,000 per month in Barking & Dagenham is not affordable for most working people living in this Borough. In 2006 I found people in my own Ward, dumped at the time by Newham, paying £350 a week for a small 2 bedroom flat. At that time, even more naïve than I am now, I didn't believe what they were saying until they showed me the paperwork.

That is why, even here in Barking and Dagenham, private renting is a disincentive to working and coming off Housing Benefit.

Having said that, many recipients of Housing Benefit are working and on low pay or at least relatively low-ish pay and do get some benefit.

And that is why it is not just the 6,000 in Westminster and Hackney that are likely to be affected by this.

London Councils have estimated that 18,645 households will be hit in the central areas of London, 14,661 with children, and that around 10,500 households will have to move, some 7,000 with children.

And while I am on figures, there are, it is estimated, 650,000 privately rented homes across London, a third of which are likely to be detrimentally affected by other changes in what is called the Local Housing Allowance.

Also, we should be clear, that this is not just about other Councils in London continuing to dump their Temporary Accommodation problems on us. It is people independently of any council being forced to up-sticks and move out of their own areas, and often people with high social care needs and extra health care needs, which is often why they are not working in the first place.

When I said that the Government has only attacked a symptom of this problem, the increasingly widely recognised fact is this - if they really wanted to save on Housing Benefit they would spend money to help us, and other Boroughs, to launch a massive programme of new council house building.

That is the way to put outrageous rents under pressure and save massively on Housing Benefit payments.

Most people who privately rent would love to be in a good quality council house and investment today in this will pay off massively tomorrow. It was the lifting of most laws on private renting in the 80s and the lack of council house building that has caused the problem and we have always said, as a Council, that the Labour Government should have tackled it when it had the opportunity.

Having finally got past the previous Tory years and then the Blair years both determined to prevent councils building houses, it was a breath of fresh air when, last year, we were able to start building again, and our 142 new house building programme is probably one of the largest in all local authorities across the country, but this Government plans to slash the money for council house building and so

the Housing Benefit problem will stagger on.

It is a stupid and short-sighted approach and the new cap just moves the problem around, from one part of London to another.

If I am honest it means that every new house built for sale will mean that another potential private renting property comes on the market.

I actually think that we now have no choice but to review our policies and look to minimising private house building in this Borough. We can't avoid some of it if we are to go ahead with our estate renewal programme, but not only does it not help us with our Council waiting list, every private sale could mean someone else from central London landing on our doorstep in an uncontrolled way, privately renting.

And even when they are not put out to private rent, many times now children of the buyers grow up and say, "I can't afford to buy like my parents did, please help me Council".

So, on top of all of this, the cap problem means that private sale places in this area, could well add to the problem and we have to think about changing policies to slow private house building and maximise Council build.

As I have said, we will have to have some for sale to get our estate renewal etc. to stack up, but I see no gain in seeing loads of for sale properties such as in Lymington, Frizlands or even on Barking Riverside, if the private renting nightmare is to continue and make things worse for the outer London areas, particularly when this Government is also trying to restrict our primary school building and our secondary school renewal.

As a council we have always said that facilities such as medical and education needs should accompany home growth, but there are now even more significant dangers for us.

Clearly, our fight for council housing is key, but we will continue to highlight the effect to the Government, we will tell the self-dubbed quiet man, Work and Pensions Secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, that we will not be quiet about this. We will also work constructively with London Councils and the Mayor to raise the issues surrounding this problem and look with them for solutions.

And finally, I would ask ALL Members of the Council, particularly those on the Development Control Board, to look critically at every proposal from house conversions to private developments to see if they are likely to add to the problem rather than house local people, and that we do all we can to develop our stock of decent housing for local people.

We will also see if we can put restrictions on the homes that are built for sale to try to stop the private renting problem. That already applies to part-buy properties to some extent, but people still get round that in my experience, so it is not necessarily the full answer.

I am sure that we will all do our best to develop our stock of decent council housing for local people and go ahead with our estate renewal. Council housing is

the real answer to cutting Housing Benefit and the best way of giving people a decent life.”