

ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 15 September 2010
(7:00 - 8:40 pm)

PRESENT

Councillor M Hussain (Chair)
Councillor J Davis (Deputy Chair)

Councillor S Alasia	Councillor J L Alexander
Councillor S Ashraf	Councillor L Butt
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 G Letchford	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 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 A Gafoor Aziz	Councillor R Baldwin
Councillor G Barratt	Councillor P Burgon
Councillor E Carpenter	Councillor H J Collins
Councillor L Couling	Councillor E Keller
Councillor M A McCarthy	Councillor C Rice
Councillor L Rice	

20. Minute's silence as a mark of respect for the victims of the floods in Pakistan

The Assembly stood and observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect for the victims of the floods in Pakistan.

21. Declaration of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest

22. Minutes (21 July 2010)

Agreed.

23. Death of former Councillor Donald Hemmett

Members paid tribute to former Councillor Donald George Hemmett who passed away on 10 August 2010.

Members noted that he had been an active member of the Labour Party and was a hard working councillor, committed to the community and who worked tirelessly for the youth of the borough. He will be missed as a colleague and friend.

The Assembly stood and observed a minute's silence in memory of former Councillor Hemmett.

24. Appointments

Received and noted the report introduced by the Divisional Director of Legal and Democratic Services.

Agreed:

- (1) to appoint only one councillor as the nominated trustee to the Barking Theatre Company Limited; and
- (2) that the Cabinet Member for Culture and Sport be appointed as the trustee to the Barking Theatre Company Limited with immediate effect.

25. Parent Governor (Primary) Co-opted Member of the Children's Services Select Committee

Received and noted the report introduced by the Divisional Director for Legal and Democratic Services.

Agreed to appoint Mrs Ghadeer Al-salem Youssef as the Primary School Parent Governor Co-opted Member to the Children's Services Select Committee.

26. Response to Petition - Parking near Doctors' Surgery 7 Salisbury Avenue Barking

This item was withdrawn prior to the commencement of the meeting.

27. Response to Petition - Traffic Management in Salisbury Avenue, Barking

As the lead petitioner (Mrs J Melis) was unable to attend, her representative Dr Niazi presented the terms of the petition requesting measures to improve road safety and traffic management in Salisbury Avenue, Barking.

Dr Niazi stated that he has been a resident of Salisbury Avenue for over ten years and that the number of motorists speeding in that road had risen in recent years, which is why residents are now raising their concerns. Whilst not commenting specifically on the accident that had happened on 5 July last, he said that this had strengthened residents' resolve to ask the Council to enforce speed limits through the introduction of speed breakers/humps and additional measures as outlined in

the petition.

The Group Manager, Streetscene introduced the report stating that Members and officers had met with the lead petitioner. She stated that it is proposed to prepare an action plan for road safety and traffic management in Salisbury Avenue and that full account will be taken of the outcome of the police investigation.

Councillor Alexander, Cabinet Member for Crime, Justice and Communities, offered the Council's deepest condolences to the family of the deceased child. She confirmed her commitment and that of the ward councillors and officers to working closely with residents on this matter.

Agreed:

- (i) to acknowledge the concerns of the residents;
- (ii) to ensure that officers, ward councillors and the respective portfolio holders work with the community to prepare an action plan for road safety and traffic management proposals for the Salisbury Avenue area; and
- (iii) that full account be taken within the review of any findings related to highway issues deriving from the police investigation and any subsequent inquiries.

28. 11th London Local Authorities Bill

Received and noted the report introduced by the Head of Customer Strategy and Transformation.

Agreed to pass the following resolution:

That the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham approves the inclusion in a Bill to be promoted by Westminster City Council of provisions effecting all or some of the following purposes -

- (a) to alter the application of Chapter VIII of Part IV of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 so that different provision may be made for travel concessions in relation to different railway services and journeys on railway services on the London Local Transport Network and so as to make provision for arbitration in cases where London Authorities consider that charges notified by Transport for London under the reserve free travel scheme are excessive;
- (b) to enact any additional, supplemental and consequential provisions that may appear to be necessary or convenient.

Following a question from a member of the public, which the Chair allowed, it was noted that an older people's day was due to be held on 1 October. The Head of Customer Strategy and Transformation advised that this proposed London Local Authorities Bill is intended to provide a better service to local people and ensure that there is a fair negotiating process in place.

29. The Standards Committee - Appointment of Independent Member and Chair

Received and noted the report introduced by the Divisional Director of Legal and Democratic Services, which included reference to the forthcoming retirement of Mrs Fiona Fairweather at the end of her term of office in October.

Councillor Smith thanked Mrs Fairweather for her work as Chair of the Standards Committee during what he described as a very difficult time.

Councillor N Gill spoke personally of having worked as a member of the Standards Committee with Mrs Fairweather, commenting that she was hard working and always very fair.

Agreed to:

- (1) approve the appointment of Mr Brian Beasley as an independent member of the Standards Committee with effect from 11 October 2010 for a period of four years; and
- (2) appoint Kevin Madden as Chair of the Committee with effect from 11 October 2010 for the remainder of the municipal year 2010/11.

30. Annual Report of BAD Youth Forum

The Chair welcomed representatives of the Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum (B&DYF), Jade Ramsey, Salwa Rahman, Shekhar Seebaluck and Tommy Lee, to the Assembly.

The Corporate Director of Children's Services introduced the report commending the B&DYF on the fantastic work they have done this year.

The Group Manager, Engagement and Extended Schools gave a brief history of the B&DYF, following which the B&DYF representatives spoke in turn about the work of the Forum:

- The Diana Award of Excellence – given for the inspirational qualities demonstrated through their commitment to tackle homophobic bullying;
- The Children and Young People Now Magazine Award – given for their short film “The Secret” to portray understanding and awareness of the issues facing young people who are lesbian or gay;
- The Health Sub-Group campaign on alcohol awareness which entailed the young people producing virals (short film clips that can be distributed via mobile phones) that were shown at the Dagenham Town Show, to raise thought provoking questions such as “How safe am I when I am drunk?”;
- The Crime and Safety Sub-Group which worked in partnership with the Progress Project (a youth forum for young people with disabilities) to create and run workshops on drugs and sexual health;
- The “Light the Park” campaign, highlighting the need for better lighting in

the borough's parks and raising personal safety awareness.

Following questions from Members, it was noted that:

- (1) additional funding would always be welcome in helping the B&DYF to get youngsters interested and keep it running;
- (2) the Forum set their own agendas for their quarterly meetings and ask questions of the councillors who attend;
- (3) there is also a Children's Forum for 5 to 12 year olds made up of representatives of the school councils, which works in the same way as the B&DYF.

Members commended the B&DYF for bringing the work they do to the heart of the Council.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Smith, gave his support to finding some funding for the "Light the Park" campaign and would endeavour to bring this to the attention of the Mayor of London.

31. Motions

Motion 1. Building Schools for the Future (BSF)

Moved by Councillor R. Gill and seconded by Councillor Smith.

"This Council welcomes the Government decision to continue to grant BSF funding to the Borough's two sample schools, Dagenham Park Church of England and Sydney Russell, to enable them to proceed with planned school improvements.

However, this Council is deeply concerned by the cancellation of over £200m of the remaining BSF funding which was planned for local secondary schools in Barking and Dagenham.

Over the next five to ten years, Barking and Dagenham will be faced with significant pressures on school places, especially with the re-development of Barking Riverside and the University of East London site. We need funding to provide first class facilities for both our primary and secondary schools. Without that finance previously earmarked for our schools, some of our young people will not get the education they deserve.

We therefore, call upon the Cabinet and our local MPs to continue lobbying Government for the necessary funding to ensure we can meet the needs of every child, and their families, in the borough."

Councillor Smith proposed a vote of thanks to Margaret Hodge MP for the support she had given. He also passed congratulations to the schools in the borough for the best ever GCSE and A level results, noting that four schools had a 100% pass rate, and commending the excellent head teachers for their dedication and hard work.

Councillor Tarry commented that the cancellation of over £200m of BSF funding is committing a generation of young people to a bleak future and will have an impact

on schools over the next 10/20 years. He seconded Councillor Smith's proposal of thanks to Margaret Hodge MP.

In summing up, Councillor R Gill reminded the Assembly that the borough had received only £47m of the promised £270m and that this is having a devastating effect on the borough. The need for school places is a big issue and if central government removes funding for it, then building and regeneration becomes pointless. Councillor R Gill referred to children today still being taught in portakabins as he himself had been. He stated that education is a child's right and this Council's statutory responsibility. He thanked both Margaret Hodge MP and Jon Cruddus MP for their support in organising productive meetings with the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove.

The motion was put to the vote and unanimously **agreed** as follows:

For: Councillors Alasia, Alexander, Ashraf, Butt, Channer, Clee, Davis, Douglas, Geddes, N Gill, R Gill, Hunt, Hussain, AS Jamu, IS Jamu, Kangethe, Letchford, McDermott, McKenzie, Miles, Mullane, Obasohan, Ogungbose, Perry, Poulton, Rai, Ramsay, Reason, Rodwell, Saeed, Salam, Smith, Tarry, Twomey, Vincent, Wade, L Waker, P Waker, White and Worby.

Against: None

Abstain: None

Motion 2. Playbuilder Grants

Moved by Councillor Tarry and seconded by Councillor McDermott

"This Council is dismayed at the decision of the Education Secretary, Michael Gove, to freeze Playbuilder Grants this year to councils across the country which would have provided the funding to refurbish existing playgrounds and play areas and build new play facilities for local children.

Because of the Government's decision, locally the future of proposed new and renovated playgrounds and play areas at St Chad's, Central Park, Harts Lane, Middle Meadow, Mayesbrook Park, Pondfield Park, Barking Park and Abbey Green is now in doubt.

Barking and Dagenham councillors believe any Government decision to scrap funding for new play schemes will be at odds with the London 2012 vision - to use the power of the Olympic games to create a healthier London.

This Council hopes, in light of the Olympics and the aim to leave a games legacy of a healthier London, that the Government sees sense and recognises that decent play facilities are not an extravagance, but a necessity.

Senior councillors intend to lobby Lord Sebastian Coe, Chair of the London 2012 Organising Committee, calling on him to put pressure on Government ministers not to betray the Olympic legacy to London youngsters, by scrapping funding for

new play areas in the Borough.

Councillors will also lobby Ministers and we urge local people to write to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister calling on them to rethink this short sighted decision."

Members spoke in support of the motion stating that they were dismayed to note the freeze on Playbuilder Grants and that this decision was shortsighted of the government. Play areas are important for children and their parents in terms of sport and exercise and also to enable them to socialise with each other.

In response, Councillor Tarry referred to the improvements on the Marks Gate estate which have brought the community together, with constituents commenting to him on how wonderful it now is.

He stated that the relatively small amounts of money that would have been coming to the borough would have had a massive impact and that the freeze is an assault on the lives of ordinary people.

The motion was put to the vote and unanimously **agreed** as follows:

For: Councillors Alasia, Alexander, Ashraf, Butt, Channer, Clee, Davis, Douglas, Geddes, N Gill, R Gill, Hunt, Hussain, AS Jamu, IS Jamu, Kangethe, Letchford, McDermott, McKenzie, Miles, Mullane, Obasohan, Ogungbose, Perry, Poulton, Rai, Ramsay, Reason, Rodwell, Saeed, Salam, Smith, Tarry, Twomey, Vincent, Wade, L Waker, P Waker, White and Worby.

Against: None

Abstain: None

32. Leader's Question Time

Question from Councillor Wade:

"Families are finding it difficult to budget without debt in these difficult times. Credit unions can be useful for small, short term loans to avoid loan sharks and high interest rates. The Council is or was talking with Liberty Credit Union to provide a service in this Borough. Havering Council has used Liberty Credit Union for some time. Is there evidence of popular use or a reduction in loan sharking?

Is there now a service in this Borough or when will there be?

How would the public be told of the service and where would any offices be?"

Response from Councillor Smith:

"I agree that Credit Unions are needed more than ever. We have done everything we can to set up a Credit Union that would enable people to come to us rather than go to "loan sharks" who charge high interest rates and we were disappointed not to have had this approved. I am glad to report that our officers and Members

have been persistent and on Monday this week I met with the Corporate Director of Adult and Community Services and I would like to invite her to update on the situation.”

The Corporate Director of Adult and Community Services reported that the Financial Services Authority has given its approval for Liberty Credit Union to move their services to the borough and that arrangements are being made for people to sign up. She stated that it was hoped the Mayor will be the first person to do this and become member number 2010. It was noted that staff will be able to sign up through payroll services.

33. General Question Time

General Question 1 from Councillor Mullane:

“I would like to congratulate this Council on the proposed redevelopment of the Leys estate. Would the Cabinet Member for housing be able to assure me that within this estate renewal the overwhelming majority of properties will be Council homes and have the leaseholders as the private properties? And would the Cabinet Member also confirm that there will be a robust referral system in place to ensure the estate renewal meets these stipulations?”

Response from Councillor P Waker, Cabinet Member for Housing:

“I would like to thank Councillor Mullane for her question, which is arguably a little premature as it is an issue that we will deal with in the medium term once it has been decided how and when people are moved out of the estate renewal areas and what is pulled down and when in the three areas involved.

There is a working party, with a representative on it from each of the three wards, currently looking at this. However, there are a few matters still to be dealt with before we can really start to move ahead on all three areas.

The first is a Call-In to be heard by the Living and Working Select Committee next week. This was put in after the previous formal report to the Cabinet. I am sure this can be dealt with satisfactorily, after which a follow-up report will go to the 28 September Cabinet meeting. This is being prepared at the moment and adjusted to take in to account the views expressed by Cabinet Members and others.

We will then be focusing on the money required to empty out the flats involved (known as decanting) and the settling of matters with leaseholders so that we can then demolish the flats. It should be noted that new programme of Council house building will help us enormously in this decanting process. Our task is to maximize what we can get for Council rent in order to help the people on our list.

The degree of success we have on this depends on the amount of money we have available at that point. We can get a certain amount of council housing by putting land value in, but beyond that, it is as simple as this. The more money we can put up, the more we get for rent and while I cannot today give a figure, my commitment is to do the very best we can.

All the reports we put on this matter do highlight a number of possible sources of

money:

1. Firstly, we would obviously want to apply for grants or access any funding that might become available, albeit we know we are likely to be in some difficult times.
2. We have also highlighted the possibility of a land sale. I would not call this my personal favourite option, but it is one that if we decided the time was right and could get a good deal, we have to have this in our armoury, in case it was required.
3. We are also hopeful that changes to the national Housing Revenue Account arrangements will help us down the line, and this is looking a real possibility, as most councils across the country are recognizing the value of the offer we fought to get from the last government. This is a far cry from last year when we stepped up our long-term campaign on this, but made clear that we would be up for a reasonable deal and taking on a reasonable burden of the national housing debt, or so-called housing debt, in return for keeping all of our own tenants rent money in the future.
4. Another option is income generation in Housing by making better use of resources or in getting revenue savings to the HRA by getting better value for money for what we purchase either outside or inside the council. As well as buying other council services at better value or not using services that are unnecessary because we can do it cheaper ourselves, I am confident that progress to increase available housing revenue will be made here as well.
5. A further alternative is to use some of the Housing Capital Budget because we will be saving on repairing the declining estates once we knock them down. Again, I would not regard that as the first option if it can be avoided because of all the other things we need to do for the places we are not knocking down, but it is another funding option.

Money for the estate renewal has not been easy to come by in recent years, but there are plans to localize some use of national housing money and that is where the London Mayor's role could be increasingly important in the future.

Incidentally, while we will be campaigning for a change of Mayor next year, Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, has chosen to come to Barking and Dagenham next week and has a panel discussion on the supply of housing. As a member of the panel, part of my message to the Mayor will be that unlike some boroughs, we want to build Council housing and he should help us to do that. Also we have people living in bad conditions that we want to change and that he should be assisting us to do this as well.

The Mayor needs to understand that in our area, a large percentage of our population cannot afford to buy and, in many cases, cannot afford part-buy or intermediate housing either.

These are some of the reasons that we need to build Council housing to replace our poor estates as soon as we can, and that goes for areas such as Marks Gate

as well. The number of Council properties is clearly the issue this question raises and while it is not a matter of having a referral system, because its decisions have to go through the democratic bodies of the Council in line with its constitution, I certainly hope that we can, at the very least, end up with a similar percentage of Council housing to private as we have now, at least in overall terms.

We now need to work together to do the best we can for all our residents in this borough and I know we can unite in fighting to maximize what we can produce in terms of Council housing, much needed for people who have now waited long enough.”

General Question 2 from Councillor McDermott:

“Would the Cabinet Member for Housing like to give his thoughts on the recent announcement by the Prime Minister of ending the notion of Secured Tenancy? Under the proposals, families whose homes are under occupied, or net income afford them the ability to rent within the private sector, will have to vacate their premises. And does the Cabinet Member agree that this Council should do everything to oppose this ill-thought out piece of legislation?”

Response from Councillor P Waker, Cabinet Member for Housing:

“I have given some thought to this and the first thing I want to say is that David Cameron’s statement on this was a cynical Government excuse to avoid supporting Councils to build council housing. It is a cheap and insulting attempt to find easy answers to this in what looks to become another abysmal coalition failure.

Let me first deal with matter of under-occupation - we do try to help with this and move those who are under-occupying and are willing to move, and we try to find something acceptable to them. At the moment, we are fortunate to have back an officer who is very good at this and good at finding acceptable answers for people. We have, in fact, been able to increase this to two officers on the basis of linking in Housing Associations to do this as well and we take a hand-holding approach with great success rather than a payment or bribe-type of approach.

There are many reasons for people wanting to downsize. Sometimes it is a matter of age and people wanting somewhere smaller. We should be able to do this voluntarily and without forcing it on people with a jackboot type approach. That is entirely wrong in my view.

Someone who has lived in their Council house for 30 years, for example, sees his or her children grow up, loves living where he or she is living, should not be forced out. It is treating tenants like second class citizens to others and I do not think that is right either.

It came home to me recently when someone who bought their Council house – a person with 3 bedrooms living alone said that the elderly woman nearby, a tenant, should perhaps give her place up forcibly.

I worked out that if a Council house was bought at the discount price about 25

years ago, it would have been bought for about £16,000 and another house was then out of our Council stock and never at any point available to someone else. The tenant who did not buy, however, has probably paid us something like £50,000, maybe £70,000 in rent over those same years; whether those payments were paid by their own money or by benefits, the Council has received that money. Furthermore, we still have the property available in our stock when she does move on or sadly passes on.

I then ask myself why the person who bought should have a greater security of tenure than the tenant? Why should one be treated less favourably than the other just because her house is still going to be available at some point for other people rather than sold?

In relation to the other point in the question, secure tenure being removed because of a person's income, it then puts Council housing on a means tested basis and once again we would have to say your pay has gone up a little, here we come, let's bring the jackboot once again to stamp over your rights.

Council housing should not become ghettos for poor people. We should fight that sort of approach.

Council housing is both a legitimate and a fair form of housing people and should not be looked down on by millionaire Tories.

A mixed community in Council housing is much better for society and such a move would simply force more people into the private renting nightmare that simply means one person having any extra income they might earn at some stage being drained away to make landlords richer. I can understand someone with the odd place to rent out, but some people are making a business out of other people's misery and some of those landlords are very poor indeed. Not all of them, but too many of them.

The whole idea of attacking the security of tenure is typical Toryism; I do not and will not support the idea and I hope we as a Council will do all we can to stop such a move happening.

I want to see first class housing for first class citizens and more of it and not riches for some at the expense of poverty for others."

General Question 3 from Councillor Twomey:

"In light of the newspaper headlines of Thursday 19 August - "Toddler could lose sight in one eye from infection in dogs poo", could the lead Member please inform the Assembly as to what Barking & Dagenham are currently doing to tackle this increasing problem?

I frequently walk around the borough and also visit several parks on a regular basis, including Pondfield, Parsloes, Mayesbrook and Greatfields and I am disgusted to see the level of dogs foul on both the streets and in the parks.

The Council has recently set up a new initiative, "the Parks Safer Neighbourhood

team” and I know that there has been some success with dealing with this issue within the parks.

In my own ward this problem also highlights other issues such as the keeping of dangerous dogs and the fact that a number of residents in tower blocks seem to be keeping dogs.

I would ask, firstly, if we could consider some campaigns, encompassing both the parks and the streets, to raise awareness of this common problem and also target the people responsible for this in terms of joint working with the local police etc?

And, secondly, with the new localisation agenda, would it be possible to look into by-laws regarding the tighter control of dogs within the borough to tackle all of the above issues?"

Response from Councillor Alexander, Cabinet Member for Crime, Justice and Communities, on behalf of Councillor Collins, Cabinet Member for Culture and Sport:

“No one would disagree with the question. The Parks Police are doing a brilliant job and something that we will be raising with them and the street wardens is to challenge people who allow their dogs to foul the parks and streets.

There are by-laws that we do enforce but we have asked officers to look at this and they will be coming back to us. What I would like is for a group of us to get together and find a positive way forward through a co-ordinated approach. This should include the Police in relation to the dangerous dogs aspect.”

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

The Assembly noted congratulations to Dagenham and Redbridge Football Club for their first ever victory over Leyton Orient earlier this month.