At a meeting of the Borough Council held on Tuesday, 17 February 2004 at 7.30pm at Hounslow Civic Centre, Lampton Road, Hounslow

Present:

The Mayor, Councillor Clarke (in the Chair)
The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Cheema

Councillors


PART 1 – ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION WHILE THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE IN ATTENDANCE

1. Apologies for Absence, other Announcements and Declarations of Interest from Members

Apologies for Absence received from Councillors Barwood, Bhandari, Chopra, Driscoll, Gilson, Gray, Kinghorn, Lynch and Thompson.

Councillor Miss Reid declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 6 (a) and Councillor Carman and Councillor Hunt declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 14.

The Mayor announced that he would be taking Agenda Item 11 early at the request of Councillor Vaught.

The Mayor informed the Council that since its last meeting he had been on a visit with the town twinning association to Lahore and completed the twinning formalities which began here in 1999.

With regard to town twinning arrangements, the Mayor also reported receiving a delegation from two high schools from Shanghai facilitated by Thames Water, the British Council and the Business Education Partnership and that in April delegations from two schools in the Borough – Chiswick Community and the Green School - would be going to Shanghai.

Councillor Chatt moved the motion, seconded by Councillor Fincher, that, in accordance with section 85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Borough Council approve, on the grounds of ill-health, Councillor Gray’s failure to attend a meeting since 16 October 2003. The motion was carried.

A petition from pensioners against the council tax increase was presented to the Council by Councillor John Chatt
A petition from residents expressing safety concerns about Beversfield Park, Hounslow West was presented to the Council by Councillor Jagdish Sharma.

2. Minutes

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting of the Borough Council on 16 December 2003 be confirmed subject to an amendment to page 2, under the Draft Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy, to reflect the fact that the matter was debated at length and concerns were raised that the new policy might lead to extra bureaucracy.

Matters arising -

None.

3. Announcements

There were none.

4. To Deal with any Business Required by Law

There was none.

5. To Deal with any Business from the last Council Meeting

There was none.

6. To receive reports from the Executive and the Council’s Committees and Officers and receive questions and answers on any of these reports

a. Corporate Procurement Strategy

Councillor Sharma reported that the Executive Business Plan had committed the Council to improving procurement and implementing the action plan arising from the Best Value Review under its priority of Resources for Future Improvement. The purpose of the current report was to detail the new draft Corporate Procurement Strategy as approved by the Executive and recommend its adoption as part of the new corporate procurement arrangements for Hounslow.

Councillor Sharma answered a number of questions from Members and indicated that a written response would be prepared for those questions that could not be answered at the meeting.
Resolved:--

That the Council adopt the draft corporate Procurement Strategy as part of the new corporate procurement arrangements for Hounslow.

b. **Local Government Electoral Wards – Amendment to Polling Districts and Polling Stations**

The Assistant Chief Executive (Legal) reported that, following a consultation with Members and other representatives of political groups, a review had been carried out of all polling stations in each electoral ward. The opportunity had also been taken, at the specific request of Members in some wards, to review anomalies in polling district boundaries which became apparent in the local elections of 2002, with the intention of improving electoral access. It was noted that the changes proposed were of a minor nature and that ward Members have been consulted twice on the issue.

Resolved:--

1. That the Council approves the changes to polling station locations in polling districts A (Bedfont Ward), polling district FC (Cranford Ward), and polling district OA (Osterley and Spring Grove Ward)

2. That the Council approves the changes to polling district boundaries within polling districts H and HA (Hounslow West) and polling districts G and GA (Heston West) in order to improve accessibility for electors

3. That the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal) be authorised to approve, in consultation with all relevant ward Members, any future changes that become necessary to the location of polling stations by reason of their becoming unavailable before June 10th 2004.

c. **Housing Rent Levels and Housing Revenue Account Budget 2004/05**

Councillor Chatt presented the HRA budget report which had been prepared by Hounslow Homes in consultation with the Council and which had been endorsed by the Board of the Company.

The proposals in the report were to increase the rent in line with the government requirements for subsidy and rent restructuring and to increase other fees and charges in line with the rent increase. This would result in an average rent of £64.80 for 2004/05, an average increase of £2.60 or 4.18%.

Councillor Chatt reported that the current level of spend would result in a budget deficit on the HRA of around £3m by 2005/06. The payment of the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) subsidy should allow a three-year phasing of any savings that needed to be made to ensure that the HRA would remain in balance in the medium term. This would give the Council and Hounslow Homes the scope to plan to minimise the impact of such savings on service users. Councillor Chatt said that it would also be
necessary to look at the implementation of service charges as a means of balancing the Housing Revenue Account (HRA); it was proposed that a working party be established with the Hounslow Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations (HFTRA) to consider the options.

Councillor Chatt reported that the government has been moving funding out of London on both the general fund and the HRA. The budget deficit was largely due to an inflation only increase in Management and Maintenance (M&M) Allowances and to a significant increase in the number of properties sold under the Right to Buy. The changes in management and Maintenance subsidy included a reduction of £100 per property on the exemplifications published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in the summer within the context of a national increase in M&M of 6% with a further 2% to reflect the impact of rent restructuring. The medium term impact of this change, compared with the business plan assumption of a 4% increase, was still being assessed.

Councillor Chatt pointed out that the ACE (Finance) ’s comment on the report identified Supporting People as being an outstanding item however the ODPM had now published the grant allocation for Supporting People and Councillor Chatt reported with regret that the Supporting People grant allocation would not have an inflationary increase. As a result of this, the proposed increase for Supporting People costs in recommendation 9 and Appendix 7 of the report could not now proceed and the HRA would have to absorb the £15,000 loss of income.

Councillor Chatt responded to a number of questions from Members and undertook to provide a written response to questions raised by Councillor Bowen.

**Resolved:-**

1. That the Council note that that due to the reductions in government subsidy and the ongoing stock reduction through the Right to Buy spend at the current level will result in a budget deficit of some £3m on the HRA by 2006. This will in turn require significant reductions in the cost of the service or the identification of other sources of income
2. That the Council confirm the decision of the Board of Hounslow Homes to secure efficiency savings of 2% pa in 2004/05 and future years to assist in addressing the nascent budget deficit
3. That the Council note the reduction in Housing Subsidy including the £720,000 reduction in the Major Repairs Allowance
4. That the Council approve that the average rent be set at £64.80 being the capping limit. This effectively means an average increase of £2.60 per week or 4.18% with effect from Monday 5 April 2004 being the amount expected by the government in calculating the HRA subsidy entitlement
5. That the Council approves the HRA Budget for 2004/05 and the Revised Estimate for 2003/04, as set out in sections 5 and 7 of this report and shown in detail in appendix 1

6. That the Council approves the charges set out in appendices 3 and 4 for Garages, Car Ports and Parking Spaces, Sheds, Central Heating servicing and maintenance and District Heating, to be implemented with effect from Monday 5 April 2004, noting that these are based on rent increase rounded where appropriate. It was also noted that a review of garage policy is currently underway and that Hounslow Homes will bring proposals to the Council to set garage rents for non-council or leasehold tenants at the market rate

7. That the Council sets the estimated management charge for leaseholders at £180pa for 2004/05, with a one third reduction for the 13% leaseholders receiving fewer services.

8. That the Council sets the rents for the Hayburn Trust Properties at 15 Bolton Road in line with the government’s rent restructuring regime with effect from Monday 5 April 2004 as per Section 6.5 of the report

9. That the Council makes a contribution from the HRA to meet additional costs in the general fund arising from the transfer of rent rebates out of the HRA.

10. That the Council makes representations to the government about: the adverse impact of rent restructuring, the reduction of the Housing element of HRA subsidy and the cut in the Major Repairs Allowance

**d. Annual Audit Letter – Audit of Accounts 2002/03 and Audit Commission Relationship Manager’s Letter 2002/03**

Councillor Chatt presented the report which informed Members of receipt of the Annual Audit Letter – Audit of Accounts 2002/03 and the Audit Commission Relationship Manager’s Letter 2002/03 – and indicated that the Executive had commended both letters to the Council for consideration.

**Resolved:-**

That the Annual Audit Letter and Relationship Manager’s Letter 202/03 be noted.

7. To receive reports (if any) about, and receive questions and answers on, the business of joint arrangements and external organisations

There were none

8. To consider any questions received in accordance with paragraph 9.2 of the Council Procedure Rules

Councillor Cooper Could the Executive Member for the Environment please inform the Council of any policy developments in response to the recently announced aviation white paper?
Councillor Cadbury indicated that this matter had been briefly reported to the meeting in December. Councillor Cadbury said that there was relief that the third runway was not proposed on this occasion but concern that it had not been ruled out altogether. Councillor Cadbury welcomed various initiatives that will assist in the reduction of noise levels for residents, particularly for those with homes near the airport and children in local schools. Councillor Cadbury indicated that there was a need for the Council to update its current policy so that it became an aviation policy rather than just one relating to the airport and said that the Council would continue to oppose night flights and any proposals for a third runway in any future consultations. Reference was also made to Councillor Pritam Grewal’s recent meeting with EU colleagues from areas adjacent to airports and the usefulness of further liaison was noted.

In a supplementary question from Councillor Cooper, Councillor Cadbury indicated that a judicial review on the aviation white paper was being considered by some parties and that the Council was monitoring this situation. However the risk of involvement in such a legal action would have to be carefully assessed as the costs involved could be very high.

**Councillor Carey** What progress if any has been made to ensure that the criteria for selecting Mayor is transparent and fair, for what it meant to be a non partisan post?

Councillor Chatt indicated that the Majority Party would be putting forward a candidate for election under the democratic process.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Carey suggested that the process was not supposed to non-partisan and asked whether Members other than those from the Majority Group would be asked to fill the post. Councillor Chatt indicated in response that the Majority Group had no plans at present to put forward a candidate from one of the Minority Groups but that this might not be the case in future and the Majority Group reserved the right to field candidates of its choice.

**Councillor Bowen** Will Councillor Wason make a statement about the Borough-wide fortnightly publication that was agreed at the Executive meeting on 3 November 2003?

Councillor Wason replied that the Council was launching its new magazine on 24 February and all Members were invited. The publication will be produced in partnership with Hammersmith and Fulham in order to minimise costs which will be covered by advertising revenue. It was felt that the magazine would be a cost effective means of communicating with residents.

In a supplementary questions Councillor Bowen asked what safeguards could be given that the magazine would not give more coverage to one group of councillors than another. Councillor Wason gave assurances that the
purpose of the magazine was not to promote any particular group of councillors.

9. To consider any motions received in accordance with paragraph 10.1 of the Council Procedure Rules

There were none.

10. To consider proposals (if any) from the Executive relating to the Council’s budget and policy framework

There were none.

11. To consider reports (if any) from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Vaught presented the report of the Young People’s Facilities Scrutiny Panel explaining that the Panel had spent a year consulting young people and the various parties involved in the provision of services to young people and had identified a number of areas in which the Council did not seem to be supporting young people as well as it might. In particular, Councillor Vaught pointed to the lack of a strategic plan for young people’s facilities and the lack of youth clubs and facilities in many areas of the Borough.

Councillor Ellar presented the response of the Executive to the Young People’s Facilities Scrutiny Panel. Councillor Ellar welcomed the work of the Scrutiny Panel and agreed that the report highlighted the present situation regarding the facilities and services offered to young people by the Council. However, Councillor Ellar felt that the report was unfairly pessimistic about the current situation. Councillor Ellar referred to various initiatives within the Borough in which the Council works closely with a variety of partners to provide young people’s services and highlighted successes in attracting funding for refurbishing the Council’s three youth clubs. Councillor Ellar reported that National Youth Agency benchmarking figures show the Council performing reasonably well compared to other local authorities and noted that the Council rates amongst the best in terms of boroughs bringing in additional resources for young people’s facilities.

However, in response to representations made by Members at the meeting, Councillor Ellar agreed that the Executive response should be referred back to the Executive for further consideration.

12. Appointment to Committees and Other Bodies

Resolved:-

That the Council approves the following appointments:
(a) That Councillor Lamey be reappointed to the Brentford Dock Ltd

(b) That Councillor Mohinder Gill be appointed to the London Boroughs Grants Associated Joint Committee in place of Councillor Batholomew

(c) That Mrs S Mockeridge be reappointed to the Heston Parochial Charities

13. Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved -

That the public and press be asked to leave the meeting during discussion of the remaining item of business because exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 7, 8 & 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, is likely to be made known

14. Budget Strategy 2004/05

Councillor Chatt presented the report which detailed the Final RSG Settlement and the two major outstanding budget issues namely funding in respect of the Hillingdon Judgement and the announcement of the Licensing Transfer. The report also proposed a further small group of budget reductions.

Resolved –

1. That the Council notes the details of the Final RSG Settlement
2. That the Council notes the funding in respect of the Hillingdon Judgement and an announcement on the Licensing transfer remain outstanding
3. That the Council approves the seven budget reductions set out in Appendix A to the report

The meeting closed at 9.10pm