

## **Brent Council's Navratri festival grant is to be axed from this year.**

### **The background**

The Council has a mammoth task to cutting its budget by approx. £ 38 million this year.

The Leader of Brent Council, [Ann John](#), will be explaining the cuts to Brent's funding at [area consultative forums](#) in January and February 2011.

Brent residents are invited to come along, meet the Leader - and the Deputy Leader, [Councillor Muhammed Butt](#) - and have their say about the issues that concern them.

Cllr John said: "Government cuts will affect us all, so I expect them to dominate the agenda. I hope many people will come and have their say at the area forums. It's vital I and my administration hear local people's priorities, as we face these very tough decisions."

In 2011/12 Brent Council needs to save £38m.

Cllr John added: "Unfortunately we cannot continue to provide the same level of services with a quarter of our funding removed. Some services are statutory which means we have to provide them, so it's the other services that we have to look at."

The area forums are a chance for residents to discuss and debate local issues with councillors and fellow residents and give people a direct say about the issues that matter to them.

### **Wembley Area Consultative Forum**

#### **Future forum meetings:**

7pm Tuesday 18 January 2011

7pm Tuesday 12 April 2011

#### **Venue**

Patidar House,  
22 London Road,  
Wembley, Middlesex HA9 7EX

#### **Wards covered**

Alperton, Northwick Park, Preston, Sudbury, Tokyngton and Wembley Central

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### **Action taken:**

- 1. On 18<sup>th</sup> Jan 2011, Mahendra Pattni sent an e-mail to all office bearers of the Brent Hindu Council affiliated member organisations as follows,**

*"Brent council is proposing to reduce the festival budget and proposals include cutting the Navratri Grant. We need to do all we can to ensure that the Navratri grant remains and for that we all have to make immediate representations to our councillors. You can do this individually as well as through your organisation and get as many people as you can to write to the council to not cut the Navratri Grant. Time has come to act and you must do so urgently. Hindu Council will be organising a meeting to discuss what collective action we need to take stop this happening. Arvind bhai will contact very soon.*

*In the meantime the leader of the Council will be holding forums to explain the various cuts as detailed below. The Wembley area forum is today at Patidar House, London Road, see details above at 7pm. I urge you all to attend to hear the leader and also make our representations."*

**2. A meeting was called by Arvind Dhutia (General secretary, BHC) on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> Jan 2011, 9pm at Patidar house to discuss the implications and next steps.**

Representatives from approx 14 organisations attended the meeting. Liberal democrat councillor Paul Lorber was present and provided some good insight into the issues and implications.

**Some of the points discussed are as follows,**

1. The proposal of cutting the Navratri grant was made by an "executive committee" of 10, mainly Labour councillors. They will have a "scrutiny" meeting on Wednesday 2nd February regarding this action. However as this decision is going to be "scrutinised" they will not pass final judgement as "scrutinizing" delays this by a few weeks.
2. There is no Hindu Councillor on the executive committee!
3. The festival budget cuts includes other festivals like Eid, Xmas lights etc.
4. Navratri cuts will affect 35k people in Brent.
5. Diwali costs council around £97k per year, Navratri funding is £67k per year.
6. Diwali wastes a lot of money on procession - main cost is the health and safety and management of the event. It's not value for money.
7. It was mentioned that there is a lack of understanding in the "executive committee" of how we celebrate both events, Diwali we celebrate already with family and friends and each community has their own celebration. Navratri we don't celebrate within family and is a larger group thing so taking this away will have more effect.
8. Diwali was agreed because it's more of a corporate event and everyone in Brent can enjoy the fireworks regardless of religion.
9. Navratri fund actually goes back to the community in terms of paying for hall hire etc. Schools use that money to do extra-curricular activities

**Action points:**

1. Petition collections from each organisation and pass over to Hindu Council
2. Suggestion for Hindu Council to send emails of all councillors to all organisations who in turn pass onto their members to email all councillors so they get lots of emails and get pressured to take action.
3. Organisations to put pressure on local councillors to talk to the executive committee to re-consider.
4. It was decided at the meeting (as suggest by Paul Lorber) to attend the Scrutiny meeting arranged at the town hall on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2011 at 7.30pm and put a strong case for Navratri grant.
5. Hindu Council were to email everyone today with an update of meeting

**3. The Scrutiny meeting was held on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2011, 7.30pm at Brent Town Hall.**

Approximately 20-30 representatives from various organisations attended the meeting. Liberal democrat councillor Paul Lorber was present and provided strong support in favour of Navratri grant.

4 speakers were given opportunity to speak and present their arguments against the proposals by Brent Council at the Brent Council meeting.

**BHC President, Narmalaben Patel** emphasised the importance of Navratri festival to Hindu community.

1. Navratri is celebrated in Brent for approx. 40 years in partnership with Brent Hindu Council and Community organisations.
2. Throughout these years there has never been any issue with bad behaviour, alcoholism, vandalism or any such things.
3. The festival is enjoyed by all, from very young children to senior citizens alike.
4. BHC makes sure that organisation share the funds with members of the community by making admissions free for children under the age of 12 and only allows charging for over 12 at a maximum of £3 per person.
5. 67k is distributed among 30-35 organisations.

**Bharat Gajjar** (Shree Vishwakarma Association of UK) had gone through his points mentioned in the document below.

[.Bharat Gajjar .docx](#)

**Paresh Modasia** (Shree Rajput Dhobi Samaj) had gone through his points mentioned in the document below.

[.Paresh Modasia.docx](#)

**Paresh Shah** (Aden Mitra Mandal) wrapped it up by mentioning that,

1. 67k spent by council for Navratri celebration is a very good value for money. Almost 15k people in Brent enjoy the celebration on daily basis for 10 nights. This works out at 40p per person per night.
2. Hindu Community is thankful to Brent Council for providing the funding.
3. Hindu community understands that the cuts needs to be made, and is willing to discuss different options and should be given opportunity to come up with different option on how to better spend the funds.

Councillors Paul Lorber has put up strong arguments in favour of Navratri funding and letting Hindu community decide where the festival budget should be better spent.

Labour councillors agreed to take this into consideration. Upon intense scrutiny they have agreed that the option 1 and option 2 suggested in the proposal document <http://democracy.brent.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=4120> (page 83) is not the final option and that different options will be open at the next consultation meeting. Notice of that meeting will be sent to BHC in due course.

Paresh Modasia also asked the council to provide the details of Diwali celebration cost breakdown. The office in-charge agreed to provide it.

## **Some important documents on this issue**

(source: Brent Council website)

**Brent Council's Arts and Festivals strategy (for cuts)**

<http://democracy.brent.gov.uk/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=3821&Opt=0>

Proposal Document

<http://democracy.brent.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=4120>