

MINUTES OF THE PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SELECT COMMITTEE
Tuesday, 11th March 2008 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Dunn (Chair), Councillor Detre (Vice Chair) and Councillors Bessong, Butt, Jackson (alternate for Councillor Pagnamenta) and Van Kalwala.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mendoza and Pagnamenta.

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None declared.

2. Deputations

None.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 22nd January 2008

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 22nd January 2008 be received and approved as an accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

None.

5. Comprehensive Performance Assessment Refreshed Score for 2007

Bridget Duley (Corporate Policy Manager, Policy and Regeneration Unit) introduced the report and confirmed that the Council had received a 3 star rating and been described as improving well for its Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) refreshed score for 2007. The area of most concern was with regard to the Culture Block which had suffered from resident satisfaction surveys concerning museums and art galleries. The Council had made representations to the Audit Commission regarding whether it was fair to have such facilities assessed taking into account the fact that Brent was an outer London Borough.

The Chair then invited Members to discuss the CPA assessment. Councillor Bessong enquired whether any measures had yet been implemented to try to boost the Culture Block score. Councillor Detre, in noting that the percentage of performance indicators (PIs) had fallen from 30% in the previous year to 23% for 206/2007, enquired whether this presented a risk to losing the current overall 3 star rating and

commented on there being a few issues of concern. He felt that the Council was in a good position to be able to influence performance in housing and that it should focus on areas that it could improve upon within 12 months. With regard to libraries, he suggested that other ways of promoting library use to residents should be considered. Councillor Jackson sought details on how Parks' performance was assessed and queried the relevance of the PI with regard to theatre visitor performance, acknowledging that Brent was not renowned as a location for this form of entertainment. Councillor Butt enquired whether festivals were included as part of the Culture Block assessment.

The Chair acknowledged that library performance had been a long standing issue and stressed the importance in encouraging greater numbers of residents to visit libraries and suggested that it would be helpful to receive information on what was specifically being done to address this issue.

In response to the issues raised with regard to CPA assessment, Bridget Duley confirmed that the Council had no control over the PIs that had been set with regard to museums and theatres, nor the method in which they were assessed and she confirmed that 2 Culture Block PIs were in the bottom quartile range relating to libraries. In addition to the number of library visitors, the number of books borrowed also needed to increase. There were 3 PIs in the lower quartile range in relation to satisfaction with theatres and art galleries. It was noted that no more than 2 PIs could be in the lower quartile range in order for it to be possible to obtain a 3 star block rating. Members were advised that various action plans were in place designed to improve the Culture Block score. Bridget Duley confirmed that the 2 PIs were performing well in relation to Parks assessment, and that festivals were not included as a measure in the Culture Block. With regard to theatre performance, Bridget Duley advised that this was an area of concern for a number of West London boroughs that shared borders with the West End. With regard to libraries performance, Phil Newby (Director, Policy and Regeneration) suggested that the Council look at the sort of experience offered to customers by commercial book stores. Having high quality facilities, cafes and stock would improve take up and borrowing.

The Chair then invited Bridget Duley to give a presentation outlining the focus for the future following the CPA's replacement by the Comprehensive Assessment Area (CAA) in 2009. Bridget Duley advised that there would be no star rating or league tables but a narrative evaluation and traffic light type rating of the overall performance of the local area, which will include the work undertaken by the Council and all its partners. The CAA would replace some but not all performance frameworks, including social services ratings. Bridget Duley then highlighted some of the key features of the CAA which included:-

- Self-assessment and sector-led improvement of all sectors
- Area and institution based working and assessments
- Recognition of risks to delivering outcomes
- Being forward looking, including an assessment of how things are likely to develop or change
- Joint assessment undertaken by the regulators
- Risk-based (triggered) inspection

Bridget Duley then explained that the CAA would have a new national indicator set, consisting of 198 indicators, published annually and would also include annual area risk and direction of travel assessments. The Council and its partners would focus on making progress towards its Local Area Agreement targets and would take on board the views of users, other stakeholders and briefings from the Government Office. Progress would also be tracked through self-assessment and inspection findings. Members heard that in order to receive a positive CAA assessment, the Council would be required to prove that it has the capacity to draw up realistic plans and the means to implement and achieve the aims set. It was therefore vital that the Council ensured that it had the necessary systems and processes in place to deliver. Meanwhile, Council members' role in ensuring delivery would include setting and scrutinising the strategic direction, priorities and budget options for the Council and its' partners. In addition Council members' role would be to query current performance and improvement plans and to seek assurance that the necessary systems were in place to manage performance, risk and resources. Members would also be expected to use their local knowledge to identify patterns following feedback from their constituents and on any complaints received and also to provide input on designing strategic solutions. The specific role of the Performance and Finance Select Committee would include:

- challenging under performance
- challenging value for money
- focusing on how objectives will be met as opposed to what needs to be achieved
- highlighting risks to not achieving the ambitions
- ensuring focus on what really matters to residents

Members then discussed the presentation on the CAA. Councillor Detre queried how the Council could be answerable in some performance areas, particularly areas where other organisations, such as the NHS or the Police had a large influence in and he queried how such organisations could be scrutinised or influenced by Council members. Councillor Van Kalwala enquired about the costs involved to ensure the right systems and processes were in place to meet the CAA's objectives. Councillor Bessong sought details about inspection arrangements between the relevant organisations.

The Chair sought further information with regard to the composition of the PIs and on the data collection system that would be required.

In reply to Members' queries, Phil Newby advised the Select Committee that the CAA would focus on the 35 PIs drawn from the national indicator set to form the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and also consider the rest of the national indicator set. Some Inspections would also continue to be part of the assessment. Elements concerning self-assessment and direction of travel would remain within the framework of CAA assessment. Members noted that it had initially been thought that the CAA would take a more stream-lined approach, although the latest proposals indicated that this was no longer the case. The Council was in negotiation with its partners and the Government over what the 35 local indicators would be. CAA targets would be set following discussions between the Council and the relevant partner organisations. Phil Newby stated that the Council did have some influence on partners, joint priorities and performance citing the example of Council representatives on the Crime Prevention Strategy Group which had proven its effectiveness. With regard to health issues, the Council's relations with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) were improving and it was hoped that this would continue. It was noted that the CAA may be more effective in large cities such as London as it presented more opportunity to provide community leadership in an environment where there were a larger number of organisations and the boundaries of responsibility were often more blurred. It was anticipated that the CAA would also provide more opportunity for scrutiny with a greater role for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the process. Phil Newby emphasised that a successful assessment was dependent on sound management of the systems and processes that were in place. Jo Mercer (Policy and Regeneration Unit) confirmed that the council's performance management system, Performance Plus, was being updated so that it could collect the information as required by the CAA.

Bridget Duley advised the Select Committee that although targets were only required for 35 of the CAA's PIs, the Council and its partners would be setting its own targets for other PIs too. The Council would be the lead partner within the partnership and the role of Council members in scrutiny was crucial as they were the only elected representatives. Members noted that there had been a trend towards greater collaboration between the Council and its partners since the CPA had been introduced, whilst the CAA had called for even greater collaboration with joint inspections of partner organisations required.

Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director [Policy], Policy and Regeneration) advised that there had been a number of responses to the Government's original proposals for the CAA, particularly from the Local Government Association (LGA) who had expressed concern that the CAA did not offer any reduction on the heavy burden placed on Councils in terms of reporting. In addition, internal assessments were

to be reported on with even greater frequency, from once every 3 years to annual reporting and it was hoped that this would be reduced to 1 assessment every 2 years. Concern had also been raised with regard to the growing number of inspectorates, particularly in areas such as social housing, whilst there also appeared to be a number of contradictions within the current proposals. Cathy Tyson commented that recording of improvements to direction of travel was likely to take longer because of the greater number of organisations included in a partnership arrangement. It was anticipated that the Audit Commission would respond with a new set of CAA proposals in July 2008.

RESOLVED:-

that the report on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment Refreshed Score for 2007 be noted.

6. Performance and Finance Review – Quarter Three (September – December 2007)

Phil Newby introduced the report and drew Members' attention to Appendix F, Vital Signs Performance Digest, which highlighted the areas of highest risk and invited questions and comments from Members.

Councillor Bessong asked if the Council was confident that there would be an improvement in performance in relation to PI BV011b, Black/Ethnic minority employees in top 5% earners. He sought further information on why BV084a.05, Kg of Household Waste Collection per Household performance was not being met. Councillor Detre requested that dissatisfaction be passed on to Lead Members or Lead Officers where they had not made any comments with regard to areas of concern.

In relation to BV82ai+bi, Percentage of Household Waste Recycled or Composted, the Chair asked if there had been any progress with regard to producing a new recycling guide. The Chair, in noting that graffiti was becoming an increasing problem, requested a report on graffiti, including how much was being removed and the time required to remove it once it had been reported, prevention strategies and coverage of any other relevant issues with regard to graffiti.

In reply, Bridget Duley stated that with regard to the number of Black/Ethnic minority employees in the top 5% earners, a small change in staff numbers could have a significant impact on the figures. However, she felt that focusing on this issue with regard to the top 25% earners was arguably more useful, adding that a number of initiatives to help staff from these ethnic groups to obtain promotions were being undertaken. Bridget Duley undertook to obtain information with regard to the recycling guide and to household waste collection.

Phil Newby confirmed that the relevant Lead Members and Lead Officers would be contacted with regard to Councillor Detre's dissatisfaction on the lack of any comments with regard to areas where performance was of concern.

7. A Comparison of Brent's Performance 2006 - 2007

Bridget Duley introduced the report, explaining that the Council was required to report against a set of national PIs, which was audited by the Audit Commission who then released the information on all councils to allow local authorities to compare their performance in a national context. Members noted that the percentage of the Council's Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) in the top quartile had decreased from 30% in 2005/2006 to 23% in 2006/2007, however the percentage of BVPIs in the bottom quarter had dropped from 25% to 24% in the same period. Bridget Duley added that although a lot of the Council's PIs had improved, they were not improving as fast as other Councils which explained the reduced number of BVPIs in the top quartile.

Councillor Detre noted that the performance of the Council was not improving at the rate compared to other local authorities and suggested that a report highlighting areas that the Council could improve upon over a 12 month period be produced. He also sought information on the likelihood of improvements to the cleanliness of highways. Councillor Bessong, in relation to percentage of items of equipment delivered within 7 working days for households receiving homecare, enquiring whether the Royal Mail was responsible for delivery. Councillor Butt commented that there seemed to be a number of BVPIs within Housing and Community Care whose direction of travel had fallen. Councillor Van Kalwala sought details as to how the Service Areas responded to the information presented and how did it feed it into action plans.

The Chair suggested that future reports could highlight areas that the Council had direct influence over, including over its partner organisations. He stressed the importance in clarifying areas that were delivering significantly below the targets set as well as those that were performing well in order to provide focus for Members and officers.

Officers then replied to Members' comments. Phil Newby acknowledged that a number of local authorities were improving faster than Brent and that this was a priority area that was to be addressed across a number of Service Areas. He confirmed that during 2006/2007, the Council and the PCT offered a joint delivery service for care equipment to homes, however this service had since been outsourced.

Cathy Tyson advised the Select Committee that the majority of BVPIs involved partnerships with other organisations, and that although most

areas had experienced improvements, many had reached the stage where further improvements were more difficult to attain under the CPA Performance Management System. She added that more innovative ways of working with partners was required to deliver improved performance in satisfaction and outcome-based surveys.

Bridget Duley advised Members that the performance relating to highways cleanliness related to the previous waste management contract and it was expected that significant improvements would be recorded since the contract specification had been upgraded. Although there had been a number of BVPIs whose direction of travel had fallen within Housing and Community Care, many had performed well in the past and only a very small number were in the bottom quartile. Bridget Duley informed Members that the Service Areas had planning programmes to address performance issues, and that action plans would be tailored accordingly to each Service Area depending upon the performance of the BVPIs relevant to it.

8. Performance & Finance Select Committee Work Programme

The Chair invited Members to make suggestions for the Select Committee's work programme for 2008-2009.

Council Properties leased to Organisations at Below Market Value Rent

The Chair commented that Council properties were sometimes leased to outside bodies at below market value rent and enquired whether this was an area that the Select Committee could consider. In particular, the Chair asked whether a report could be presented that would include details of the properties available to outside bodies, who had they been leased to and why, for what purpose and for what length of period.

Councillor Detre asked if any checks were in place prior to leasing properties to outside bodies, and in addition to the requests made by the Chair regarding the report, asked that it also include details of the value of the discount from market value rent, when the relevant outside body's account was last reviewed and whether they were offering a community service.

Councillor Jackson felt that unused properties should be offered at market value rents in view of the Council's financial position, although he acknowledged that discounts should be considered where organisations were offering services that were compatible with the Council's aims.

In response, Phil Newby stated that this was an area that the Select Committee could consider, stating that there were moves to regularise the system of providing accommodation to outside bodies. He added that the overall policy in relation to this issue could also be considered. Members noted that Peter Stachniewski (Deputy Director, Finance and

Corporate Resources) and Jo Mercer would look at what could be reported upon in respect of this issue and devise an appropriate timescale for this topic to come back to the Select Committee.

Miscellaneous

The Chair asked that the Select Committee and officers consider whether there were any training requirements for Members and whether there was a need to arrange sessions prior to meetings to provide Members with information on background issues or consider lines of questioning.

Councillor Detre commented on the high quality of the CPA and CAA report and handouts presented at this meeting.

9. Items Requested onto the Overview and Scrutiny Agenda

None.

10. Recommendations from the Executive to be considered by the Performance and Finance Select Committee

None.

11. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be confirmed at the Council meeting on 19th May 2008.

13. Any Other Urgent Business

None.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm

A DUNN
Chair