



MINUTES OF THE PARTNERSHIP AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 14 December 2010 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Van Kalwala (Chair), Councillor Clues (Vice-Chair) and Councillors A Choudry and Hirani

Also Present: Councillor Jones (Lead Member for Human Resources and Diversity, Local Democracy and Consultation)

An apology for absence was received from: Councillor HB Patel

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 October 2010

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 October 2010 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising

None.

4. Progress on a Voluntary Sector strategy

Joanna McCormick (Partnerships Coordinator, Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) introduced the report and explained that the Voluntary Sector Strategy focused on the main themes of communication and coordination of services. A draft strategy document would be consulted upon with the wider voluntary sector once the implications of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) had been identified. Members heard that work on the Strategy had begun in 2009 and discussions to date had recognised a number of objectives and aims shared by partners. A number of factors had been identified that affected the ability to improve the relationships between the public, voluntary and community sectors and key themes included commissioning, engaging and consulting - especially with the hard to reach groups. It was noted that a number of issues had been raised at the One Community, Many Voices Event which were being fed into the development of the strategy. The issues raised included giving organisations a better understanding of what funding is available from external sources, promoting volunteering and volunteer responsibilities, what 'Big Society' means for Brent and places for small voluntary organisations to meet. Joanna McCormick advised that

'Brent – Our Future' Strategy was committed to building a Voluntary Sector Resource Centre and the availability of other Local Strategic Partners (LSP) buildings could also be explored. The council had a strong relationship with the Brent Multi-Faith Forum and the Corporate Diversity Team had successfully implemented a Building Stronger Communities Programme.

During discussion by Members, Councillor Clues commented that more importance may be placed on the voluntary sector because of the 'Big Society'. He sought further clarification with regard to Brent Association for Voluntary Action's (BrAVA) role and had an audit been undertaken with regard to their effectiveness. He sought assurance that there was sufficient confidence that BrAVA could deliver its objectives effectively. Councillor A Choudry also expressed concern about BrAVA's ability to function effectively and felt that they needed to provide a more professional service and take the initiative more often in asking voluntary organisations what they wanted. He asked for details of what monitoring of BrAVA's performance was undertaken and who set BrAVA's agenda and whether the council had any influence over the role of BrAVA. Councillor A Choudry asked whether a study of what each voluntary organisation in Brent had been undertaken and commented that the information could be used for organisations to share services and resources or even to merge and the information could also be used as a basis to determine whether organisations were eligible for funding. Councillor Hirani stressed the importance of voluntary organisations in achieving the outcomes set.

The Chair sought details regarding BrAVA's funding arrangements, its future as a partner and the council's view of the organisation. He asked if the council's efficiency savings would impact upon the voluntary sector, had funding been identified for the Voluntary Sector Resource Centre and when was it likely to open.

In reply, Joanna McCormick advised that BrAVA's role was to act as a Community and Voluntary Service (CVS), an umbrella organisation representing the voluntary and community sector in Brent. BrAVA had received funding under the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the councils' Main Programme Grant to deliver particular projects. The effectiveness of BrAVA in achieving its outcomes as set by LAA targets and Main Programme Grant Requirements was monitored. Discussions relating to the development of the voluntary sector strategy would include the role of a CVS in the borough. Voluntary sectors representatives had stated they would discuss improvements to a CVS within the voluntary sector. Members noted that the Strategy would set out what was expected of a CVS and seek to address concerns that had been raised in respect of this. Joanna McCormick added that it was important to have an effective CVS. The council could monitor an organisation where it had provided funding or been commissioned to provide a service. Members noted that a decision was yet to be made with regard to the Main Grant Programme funding for next year, however there would be a need for efficiencies to be built in and this could have a number of implications, such as the way services were commissioned.

Joanna McCormick advised that discussions were taking place with voluntary organisations with regard to identifying an appropriate site for a Voluntary Sector Resource Centre and whether any organisations' buildings could be used for this purpose. Although BrAVA and voluntary organisations had identified some funding for the Resource Centre, more funding was still required and a number of options

were being considered. Members heard that BrAVA collected basic information on voluntary organisations in Brent, such as the overall role of the organisation, however voluntary organisations were working together to learn more about what each other does. However, because of the wide and fragmented nature of voluntary organisations in Brent, there were a number of practical obstacles in collating such information. It was intended to build upon the information obtained by BrAVA and this would assist in identifying what organisations were best placed to provide a particular service, however Joanna McCormick added that gathering information was a costly exercise. Members heard that there were also a large number of voluntary organisations in Brent that were not funded by the council.

Fiona Hill (Voluntary and Community Sector Representative, Local Strategic Partnership) advised that Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) voluntary sector representatives were due to meet with BrAVA to discuss its future role and BrAVA was holding a meeting with voluntary organisations this week to seek their views on what they require from BrAVA.

Phil Newby (Director of Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) advised that it was for the voluntary sector to decide on the CVS and what they would want from it. Whilst the council monitored and safeguarded outcomes where it had provided funding, it was also seeking views from the voluntary sector to develop the Strategy. BrAVA's role was ultimately determined by its own Board of Trustees. Members heard that the council would only continue to provide funding to BrAVA if it felt reassured that BrAVA could achieve the intended outcomes.

The Chair acknowledged the importance of the role of the CVS in effective communication with voluntary organisations and partners. He requested that an update on the draft Strategy and progress on the Voluntary Sector Resource Centre be provided at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:-

that the work undertaken to date to develop a Voluntary Sector Strategy be noted.

5. **The Local Economic Assessment**

Jo Francis (Head of Regeneration Policy, Regeneration and Major Projects) gave a presentation on the Local Economic Assessment. Jo Francis advised that the council was required to prepare the assessment and had received a one-off grant to fund this work. CLES Consulting and Shared Intelligence had been commissioned to undertake the assessment to help the council identify the challenges and opportunities that needed to be addressed to deliver sustainable economic growth. This was also to be seen in a London wide context, including consideration of what are Brent's selling points compared to other London boroughs. Jo Francis commented that India's anticipated Gross Domestic Product (GPD) growth may offer Brent opportunities as there was a significant Indian population in the borough. However, projections also indicated that the GVA performance gap in Brent would widen in the next few years because of the recession. Members noted that the majority of residents commuted to Central London or worked within Brent, with only a fraction commuting to other parts of West London.

In terms of overall employment rates, Jo Francis advised that Brent was closing the gap relative to the rest of London, however rates were lower for women and black and minority ethnic groups. The recession had caused a rise in unemployed claimants, particularly in the south of the Borough and while there had been significant improvements in young people's educational attainment, there were still a relatively high proportion of residents with no qualifications which could be attributable to language issues or foreign qualifications not being recognised. It was noted that more than a third of children in Brent lived in poverty. With regard to Brent's economic qualities, whilst the number of new businesses starting up was quite high, their long term business survival prospects lagged behind the regional and national averages. Jo Francis advised that the largest increase in employment growth rates was forecast for business services, including a number of back office functions.

During Members' discussion, Councillor A Choudry noted the significance of statistics related to black and minority ethnic groups in view of the borough's diversity and requested further information on this. He also asked if there was any information available on the number of residents having to leave Brent as a result of changes to housing benefit. With regard to Park Royal, he enquired whether there was any more capacity for more businesses to be located there. Councillor Hirani requested a breakdown of figures regarding affordability of housing, employment and housing benefit. Councillor Clues acknowledged the regeneration schemes for Park Royal and the Wembley Stadium area, however he also noted the low workforce productivity rates for Church End and Kilburn and asked whether regeneration schemes were planned for these areas too.

The Chair asked what the next steps would be in view of the findings of the assessment, including how to engage with small minority ethnic businesses and improve transport links. He also enquired on the future of apprenticeships in the borough and commented that there was a shortage of three-bedroom properties in Brent and this needed to be addressed in order to house families.

In reply, Jo Francis advised that the report was being considered by Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement to see what the next steps should be to address the issues raised. A meeting was due to take place with the National Apprenticeship Service on 16 December to discuss the future of apprenticeships in Brent. Efforts were being made to involve more local businesses with regard to the building of the Civic Centre and the regeneration of Wembley. Members noted that Employer Partnership was the main vehicle used to engage with small minority ethnic businesses which involved explaining to them what opportunities were available. There was also training provided by Supply London to help local organisations be fit to tender through a series of workshops. Jo Francis advised that Park Royal had been identified as a key growth area in the Local Development Framework and it was intended to improve transport routes in this area and others through working with Transport for London. Park Royal Partnership was seeking funding for a Business Improvement District. Jo Francis explained that a significant proportion of Brent residents were in low paid employment which was a key factor to consider in terms of affordability of housing. However, the council's new structure would facilitate in bringing useful information together. Jo Francis stated that a breakdown of figures linking affordability of housing, employment and housing benefit could be provided at a future meeting and also further information with regard to black and minority ethnic statistics.

Phil Newby (Director of Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) advised that a project had been commissioned as part of the One Council Programme to investigate the effects of the Housing Benefit cap, whilst the impact of the Local Government Settlement as a result of the CSR was also being analysed. Members heard that the council's Mosaic information collection system was collecting data such as income in Brent and a sizeable difference in income within the south of the borough had been identified due to there being a large influx of young, higher income earners in this part of Brent. This population trend could affect property prices and lead to the less well off seeking social housing or displacing them elsewhere. Phil Newby also commented that polarisation of particular groups was a factor that needed to be addressed. He suggested that Members could invite the Head of Planning to a future meeting to discuss planning implications with regard to housing needs if they so wished.

The Chair commented that there were a number of employment skills and transport issues that needed to be addressed and he asked that information on the future of apprenticeships be included in a future report to the committee.

6. Policing priorities in Brent

Genny Renard (Head of Integrated Community Safety - Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) updated Members on policing priorities in Brent. She began by explaining that 83% of offenders in the borough had re-offended and this could be partly attributed to the fact that after being prosecuted for an offence, it affected offenders' ability to gain employment. The Crime Prevention Strategy Group (CPSG) was presently undertaking an assessment of issues to be addressed and looking at long term solutions to current trends in Brent such as the rise in robberies, particularly street robberies and the impact of crime upon communities. An assessment of why anti-social behaviour occurred was also being undertaken. Genny Renard advised that knife crime in Brent had fallen to the extent that it now had borderline status as a trident borough. Gun crime figures were influenced by the fact that incidences recorded included those where there was a perception that a gun was involved. Another priority area was encouraging betting shops to improve their own security arrangements. Of the most serious violent crimes committed, approximately 60-70% of these were domestic violence related and of those victims murdered, none had been known to the council and this was an area that needed to be focused on. Genny Renard advised that changes to Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT) meant that although every ward would still have an SNT, the formula applied for the composition of the SNTs had changed. It was felt that there was not a requirement for a police sergeant for SNTs in every ward and consultation was taking place with regard to this. Genny Renard commented that one possibility was that a police sergeant may cover more than one ward in areas where crime was relatively low. It was also intended to improve the mobility of SNTs to respond to incidents based on the information that had been collected for each area.

During Members' discussion, Councillor Clues enquired whether the savings required would impact upon the court service and stated that additional pressure both on courts and the police could occur as the defendant could call on a number of witnesses, including police officers. Councillor Hirani enquired whether

reductions in the performance area grant with regard to domestic violence would affect services.

The Chair enquired what the council's recommendation was with regard to SNT arrangements and sought opinion on what other changes were being considered, were there any specific proposals for Stonebridge ward and when the consultation period on this would finish. He also asked if there was any further update with regard to funding of the CPSG and the police and whether there was a lot of natural wastage in the police concerning staff reductions.

In reply, Genny Renard advised that the council was considering recommending that an SNT police sergeant cover two to three wards in areas of lower crime, whilst each ward would still have a police constable and two police community safety officers. She felt that Stonebridge would require three SNTs in view of the size of the area and its crime levels. She stressed the need for SNTs to operate smarter and work effectively with other groups. The council was currently funding 16 police community safety officers and consideration of how to make more effective use of them was being considered. Specific proposals would follow upon the conclusion of the consultation on 17 December and Genny Renard asked that councillors participate through the council's website. Members noted that an update on SNT arrangements would be presented at the next meeting. Genny Renard advised that every effort was being made to retain the domestic violence courts as conviction rates were 30% higher than other courts. This was due to judges receiving specific training in this area and the victims feeling more relaxed in these courts. Members heard that a data officer position had been lost in the domestic violence service due to performance award grant cuts, which meant less information was being collated. Bridging arrangements had been made for the service to continue to function and some funding had also been obtained from a charity. Genny Renard advised that overall there was 20% less funding available for domestic violence services and that discussion was also taking place with other West London boroughs with regard to joint commissioning of domestic violence services.

Genny Renard stated that further details were awaited in respect of funding for the CPSG and added that funding for this had not been ring-fenced. However, consideration of what changes could be made in respect of the savings required was taking place, including the possibility of selling some services to registered social landlords. Members heard that the police were reducing the number of administrative staff and were not presently recruiting. Genny Renard advised that staff reductions in the police being achieved through natural wastage was high, with a number of police staff recruited in the 1970s due to retire soon. Members noted that further details with regard to police staffing would be provided at the next meeting.

7. Services for women in and exiting prostitution - six month update on task group recommendations

Jacqueline Casson (Senior Policy Officer, Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) introduced a report updating the committee on progress on the recommendations made by the Services for women in and exiting prostitution task group. She drew Members' attention to sections in the report detailing the response to each recommendation to date, including timescales for implementation.

Councillor Hirani enquired if newspapers had been approached with regard to the task group's recommendation that they be encouraged to ensure that none of the sex industry related advertisements included photographs or information on ethnicity and age. He commented that if Brent Magazine was to be circulated less frequently, local newspapers would have an even greater impact upon the image of Brent and therefore such advertisements would have a greater negative effect on the borough. Councillor Hirani also suggested that it would be desirable if the UK signed up to an EU agreement to curb opportunities for human trafficking. Councillor Clues spoke of the increasing urgency in addressing prostitution, human trafficking and organised crime in view that the 2012 Olympics was taking place in seven months' time and he asked whether this issue had been discussed with the Mayor of London's office.

The Chair asked for an update on the recommendation that there be an article on the task group's report in the Brent Magazine.

In reply, Jacqueline Casson advised that local newspapers had been contacted with regard to the task group recommendation in respect of sex industry related advertisements, however this was now being addressed at a national level. She confirmed that the task group recommendation for an article of their work to appear in Brent Magazine was being pursued. Members heard that the CPSG were considering ways of tackling opportunities for organised crime, human trafficking and prostitution in relation to the forthcoming 2012 Olympics and that this was being discussed with the Mayor of London's office.

Genny Renard commented on the difficulties in preventing newspapers allowing sex industry related advertisements from including such details as photographs and references to ethnicity and age and this was an issue which needed to be tackled at a national level. Members noted that an application for funding from The Body Shop to tackle human trafficking had been made and Genny Renard agreed that it would be helpful for the UK to sign up to the EU agreement in relation to this.

Phil Newby advised the committee that there had been a significant reduction in 2012 Olympic funding because of the Local Government Settlement following the CSR.

The Chair advised Members that a further update on the task group's recommendations would be presented to the committee in six to 12 months' time.

RESOLVED:-

that the progress on the task group's recommendations to date be noted.

8. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Partnership and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 17 February 2010 at 7.30 pm.

9. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

Z VAN KALWALA
Chair