



**MINUTES OF THE PARTNERSHIP AND PLACE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Tuesday, 5 April 2011 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Clues (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Brown, S Choudhary (alternate for Councillor Mistry), A Choudry, Hirani, Naheerathan and HB Patel.

Apologies were received from: Councillor Van Kalwala

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday, 24 February 2011

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 February 2011 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising

There were none.

4. Cultural Strategy for Brent 2010 - 15

Rachel Evans (Chair of Brent Culture, Sport and Learning Forum, Fountain Studios) introduced herself to the committee and then played a short video to members about the cultural strategy. Copies of the cultural strategy were also circulated to Members. Rachel Evans then gave a presentation on this item and began by emphasising that it was a strategy for Brent and not Brent Council. The strategy sought to set out a vision rather than being a detailed plan and position statement and may change according to circumstances and changing priorities. The strategy had been drawn up by the Culture, Sport and Learning Forum which consisted of the council and its Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) partners, including Wembley Stadium, Wembley Arena, Tricycle Theatre, the Federation of Patidar Associations, Fountain Television Studios, the College of North West London, Park Royal Partnership, Wembley Plaza Hotel and Brent Arts Council. Rachel Evans then set out the vision and principles of the strategy, which were:-

- Enhancing cultural vibrancy
- Increasing participation
- Raising the profile of culture
- Encouraging young people to take part
- Developing public space

- Making the most of London 2012 and other major events
- Supporting the cultural economy
- Promoting health and well-being

Rachel Evans outlined some examples of the Forum's initiatives, which included events such as the Healthy Walks Scheme and the Graffiti Partnership Board, which sought to promote positive use of graffiti as an art form. In order to deliver the strategy, the four objectives that needed to be achieved were communicating what is on offer, enabling people to engage and access culture, increase and improve locations, facilities and opportunities and maximise wider benefits of culture through strong cultural links.

At this point, the committee was split into two groups and went into a workshop session on how to achieve the four objectives of delivery. The two groups then fed back to each other on the outcome of their discussions.

Rachel Evans concluded the presentation by outlining some further ways of delivering the strategy, including the launch of the visitwembleyvisitbrent.com website on 19 April, a series of events celebrating Brent, production of regular e-bulletins promoting events in Brent, engaging with leaders to promote culture and raising the profile of culture. Further examples of events in Brent were highlighted and Rachel Evans encouraged Members to inform residents of these.

Members then considered this item further. Councillor H B Patel commented on the borough's wide diversity and the various groups and venues which could be utilised to promote Brent's culture. He suggested that the local residents should have been consulted about the strategy at an earlier stage and prior to large businesses. Councillor A Choudry also spoke of Brent's ethnic make-up and the fact that some 35% of its population were from Indian sub-continent, whilst some schools had over 80% of pupils from one particular faith group. It was such aspects of the community that needed to be engaged more and Councillor A Choudry suggested that such schools be visited more often to help children feel a part of the wider culture of Brent. Councillor Hirani expressed concern that the Forum did not consist of any community, faith or voluntary sector organisations whose views should have been included to help shape the strategy. He also enquired if a prototype of the visitwembleyvisitbrent.com website could be viewed prior to the launch.

Councillor Clues (Vice-Chair in the Chair) felt that the strategy appeared to be based on a top-down view in that the larger organisations had been involved more in the consultation and at an earlier stage. He highlighted that there was also a vibrant cultural scene in Brent at a smaller, more localised scale and suggested that one of the objectives should be to bridge the gap between these levels of culture by engaging more between the two. Furthermore, there should not be a sole emphasis on focusing on Wembley as many other areas contributed significantly to Brent's culture, such as Harlesden, Mapesbury and Kilburn.

In reply to the issues raised, Rachel Evans acknowledged the points raised in respect of consultation and stated that it had involved a variety of organisations as well as Forum members. One of the main purposes of the Forum was to initially ensure that there was business support to pursue the strategy which would help enable the engagement of wider organisations and residents in Brent. She highlighted some successful cultural events, such as the Afghan Theatre Festival at

the Tricycle Theatre which had received praise from as far afield as the Pentagon in Washington DC. Rachel Evans acknowledged the need to engage more with all levels of culture in Brent and stated that the visitwembleyvisitbrent.com site had been awarded a prize by Visit London. The website highlighted a number of sites to visit in Brent and it was envisaged, for example, that Indians attending the Olympics may also be interested in visiting the Swaminayan Hindu Temple. It was similarly acknowledged that there were other areas besides Wembley that would attract visitors. However, Wembley had been highlighted as it was well known internationally and would be used as the initial draw to attract visitors to the area who would then see what else Brent had to offer and communities were to be encouraged to publicise their attractions on the visitwembleyvisitbrent.com website. A prototype of the website was not available, but all Members were invited to attend the forthcoming launch. Rachel Evans explained that allowing other organisations to join the Forum may be considered in the future and consideration of what other organisations the Forum should be engaging with was also taking place.

Sarah Tanburn (Interim Assistant Director – Neighbourhood Services, Environment and Neighbourhood Services) added that membership to the Forum was not closed and that any group which put itself forward as a potential member would be welcomed providing it had the necessary capacity. She stated that all effort should be made for more organisations to participate in making the strategy work and a good starting point would be encourage them to attend the launch of the visitwembleyvisitbrent.com website.

Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director – Policy, Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) confirmed that the LSP had been fully consulted with regard to the strategy which she stressed was about setting principles and objectives rather than producing an action plan and it would provide a framework upon which the strategy could be developed.

5. The employment and skills agenda in Brent

Joanne Francis (Head of Regeneration Policy, Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) introduced the report that provided an update from the report presented to the committee in December 2010. She stated that the Local Economic Assessment had presented a challenging picture for Brent and for the country as a whole. Providing some historical context, Joanne Francis explained that up until the summer of 2008, the council had made considerable progress in narrowing both the employment and the unemployment rate in the Borough compared to London overall with an employment rate of 71.6%, above the London average and the highest recorded in Brent and a Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) claims rate of 3.3%, the lowest in a decade. This had primarily been achieved through the Brent in2Work employment programme. However, since January 2008 there had been an increase of almost 3,500 JSA claims meaning the total claimants now stood at 9,490, representing a rate of 5.5% against a 4.1% London average. The increases were particularly prevalent in deprived areas and Harlesden had experienced close to a doubling of claimants. The claimant rate was also considerably higher amongst the Black British ethnic group. Joanne Francis explained that as well as the economic downturn being a significant factor in these trends, the situation was exacerbated by underlying socio-economic circumstances, particularly in the more deprived neighbourhoods. For example, the borough has a particularly high level of residents with no qualifications and almost ten percent of

those of working age had no qualifications and these numbers had grown between 2008 and 2009. Another Brent specific issue was the 30% of the population with qualifications gained overseas that were not formally recognised in the UK. It was also noted that in the most deprived neighbourhoods, approximately a third of residents did not speak English as their first language and this was often a significant barrier to employment, as well as the availability, suitability and affordability of childcare. The committee heard that JobCentre Plus would continue to support the short term unemployed into work despite itself facing 40% reductions in back office functions. The Work Programme provider which addressed the longer term unemployed only received payments in cases where it had successfully placed clients into work on a long term basis.

Turning to the role of the council, Joanna Francis explained that employment had long been a priority and Brent in2Work had been an effective tool in tackling this issue. However, due to the budget pressures brought on by Government cuts to the Working Neighbourhoods Fund following the Comprehensive Spending Review and the council's need to undertake a fundamental review of activities, the services offered by Brent in2Work would be reduced. This included the closing of the Language2Work project and in order to address the language needs in Brent, efforts were being made to enable voluntary organisations to take on a language teaching role through capacity building. Brent in2Work would retain a skeleton staff and continue to operate a project focusing on matching local unemployed residents to the construction and end user employment opportunities as they arise, along with supporting main projects and supporting the voluntary sector to tender for upcoming opportunities through the Work Programme. The Employer Partnership, a sub group of the LSP, would continue to liaise with local businesses. Meetings were also taking place between the Employer Partnership and prime constructors over the next few weeks to try and secure employment and skills providing opportunities and a creative approach would need to be taken to gain tangible benefits.

Maggie Pulle (Deputy Principal – Adult and Employer Responsiveness, College of North West London) then updated Members with regard to the College of North West London (CNWL). She began by stating that the CNWL had approximately 11,000 students, of which 80% were adults and 50% Brent residents and that it enjoyed a good working relationship with the council and JobCentre Plus. Maggie Pulle advised that the college faced a ten percent reduction in budget in the next educational year. For 16-18 year old students, this would mean less provision of sports, leisure and personal support and a cut to the Educational Maintenance Allowance. However, students of 19 years and above would be most affected as a 25% funding cut would be in place and approximately 2,000 adults faced having to pay fees. Of particular concern was the change to the ESOL funding regime meaning that as of September 2012, only those under 24 years of age would not have to pay any ESOL fees at NQV level one, whilst by September 2013 only those students claiming JSA would be eligible for no ESOL fees. Members heard that the Train2Gain programme had come to an end, however it was anticipated that the college would have a new funding relationship with JobCentre Plus and the Department of Work and Pensions to maintain close links with local employers.

During discussion, Councillor A Choudry enquired if an ESOL student who was on a two year ESOL course starting in September would be required to pay fees in their second year. Councillor Hirani expressed concern that the changes may dissuade those to enrol on course who may not be claiming JSA but who were on

low incomes and may also be on other benefits such as Housing Benefit. He enquired whether there was any information on private bids in respect of the new Work Programme to be launched in June. Councillor Brown sought clarification concerning whether there were any measures in place to accredit overseas qualifications and were there any other organisations that could assist in this area. Councillor H B Patel enquired what the differences in the criteria for the Work Programme would be compared to the Employment Zone it would be replacing. He also sought clarification with regard to the potential £300,000 Government funding for the CNWL. Councillor S Choudhary enquired whether Brent may be a recipient of the £50 million regeneration funding for outer London boroughs that had been announced by the Mayor of London on 28 March. He also sought reasons as to why 50% of the college's students did not live in Brent.

The Chair expressed regret that the Language2Work project would not continue as it contributed much in terms of employment opportunities and community cohesion. In noting that adult literacy classes would remain free, he enquired whether these would be open to ESOL students. The Chair also asked whether sponsorships and apprenticeships through private providers would continue to be available for college students, stating that this was an issue worthy of further consideration as there was a demand for apprenticeships at some firms.

In response to the queries raised, Maggie Pulle confirmed that if a student started a two year ESOL course this September, the college would waive fees for their second year although Government guidelines suggested that only those on JSA would be guaranteed no fees. However, in most cases such courses were only for one year. Some basic reading and arithmetic courses were also free although it was possible that beginner ESOL courses could be classified as literacy courses. The college would continue to try and secure sponsorships and apprenticeships for its students and it enjoyed an excellent relationship with some manufacturers, however it was difficult to attain sponsorships for courses below NQV level two. Yet there were a number of college students doing apprenticeships, with some undertaking these with large construction company Skanska. Maggie Pulle explained that £300,000 ring-fenced Government funding could be made available to the college depending on the number of students on JSA finding sustainable employment, although the specific criteria as to how to qualify for this funding and when it would be paid was not yet known. The committee noted that the college was legally obliged to provide education for those of 16 to 18 years old irrespective of whether they were Brent residents, whilst those students of 19 years of age or older who lived outside the borough were provided places to ensure there were sufficient students to run courses.

Joanne Francis explained that conversion courses for those who had overseas qualifications had previously been run, but due to budget pressures these were no longer available. The Partnerships Manager could explore if there were any other organisations that could provide such a service through liaising with the Provider Forum or referring to the Refugee Council. Further details with regard to the Work Programme were awaited from the Department of Work and Pensions following repeated requests, however the remit and area concerned was likely to be wider than the previous Employment Zone scheme. Members noted that there was yet to be an announcement on whether Brent would be amongst the boroughs receiving funding from the Mayor of London's regeneration funding scheme.

Cathy Tyson added that it was difficult for those from underprivileged backgrounds to break out of the poverty cycle and early years intervention and educational achievement were very important in enabling those to avoid continuing the intergenerational trend of low income levels. The costs of childcare also acted as a disincentive for those to seek employment. Cathy Tyson suggested that employment providers be invited to address the committee to discuss and answer questions on future employment provision. She also agreed to the Chair's request to provide further information on multi-level deprivation and the links to its causes.

6. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Partnership and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be confirmed at the Annual Council meeting on 11 May 2011.

7. Any other urgent business

There was none.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm.

D CLUES

Vice-Chair in the Chair