



MINUTES OF THE ONE COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE **Tuesday, 22 March 2011 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Colwill (Vice Chair in the Chair) and Councillors Beckman, Chohan, Hector (alternate for McLennan), Kabir (alternate for Sheth) and Van Kawala

Apologies were received from: Councillors Castle and Lorber

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 February 2011 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

2. Matters arising (if any)

One Council Project Update

In response to a member's request for an update on the projects relating to transition into adult life and special educational needs, Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director, Policy) stated that progress was on-going and undertook to report to the Committee once the discussions were concluded.

3. Deputations (if any)

None.

4. Strategic Procurement Project

Members received a report that set out the main elements within the strategic procurement project. Robin Edwards (Chief Negotiator, Corporate Procurement) gave a presentation to the Committee on progress of the review which was aimed at improving the way the council procured goods and services.

He started by saying that the council was spending in the region of £270m each year on supplies and services provided by other organisations and that improving the effectiveness of procurement of these supplies and services could make significant impact on the savings the council was required to achieve. He continued that the Strategic Procurement Project was therefore aimed at undertaking a root and branch change to procurement practices within Brent, with a view to contributing £10.7m to the Council's savings targets in 2011/12, with additional savings in subsequent years.

In setting out the key aims for the procurement project, Robin Edwards emphasised the need for adopting a “One Council” approach to procurement and to seek influence all areas of spend so as to build on a corporate procurement centre with the capability to implement strategy. He added that by ensuring appropriate governance arrangements to evidence probity and accountability, the Council would be able to develop best practice procurement including E-business approaches to improve compliance and automated financial processing and thereby maximise value for money.

Robin Edwards continued that the council had developed a new approach through the West London Alliance, a group of 6 neighbouring Local Authorities. This would involve exchange of information on all contracts particularly high value and significant contracts.

In the discussion that followed, Councillor Hector asked for a confirmation that some consultants were being engaged for up to 2 years at a cost of £100,000 per appointment. Councillor Van Kawala also asked for a detail clarification on the approaches that corporate procurement would take to ensure the success of its strategic project. In response, Robin Edwards stated that an on-going analysis and review was being conducted to ensure that a thorough business case was established before any temporary staff including consultants were appointed and that all such appointments would be time limited. In clarifying the approaches, he continued that an improved solution including full knowledge of procurement and category management would be offered to all directorates. He also stated that embedding category managers within services would ensure better understanding of the council’s needs in terms of goods and services and allow the council to manage suppliers in a way that would maximise value for money.

Councillor Kabir enquired about the level of help and encouragement that the council could offer to local traders to ensure that they were given preference as suppliers to the Council. Robin Edwards stated that whilst local businesses were being actively encouraged and given opportunity to bid for contracts, the council could not give them preferential treatment in the tender process. In response to Councillor Colwill’s request for measures to balance budgetary allocations, Robin Edwards informed the Committee that the use of the Oracle system and appropriate governance arrangements currently in place would ensure that budgetary allocations were being contained.

RESOLVED:-

That the report on strategic procurement project be noted.

5. **Staff Survey**

Members received a presentation from Margaret Newman, Strategic Human Resources (HR) Manager on the overview of the results of the recently completed staff survey and the Council’s priorities for action. She started by outlining the questionnaire and the methodology on which the survey was based included the following;

Your job; training and career development; performance and line management; senior management and leadership; communication; equal opportunities; work/life balance; pay and benefits; customer focus; perception of Brent Council.

The questionnaire (66 questions) was available in hard and electronic (on-line) copies and was made available to all staff to complete over a period of 5 weeks. In absolute terms there were 1,462 responses representing 55% response rate and although slightly lower than the previous year's rate, it was above average compared to other local authorities. The consultant's overall assessment was that the views expressed in the results were quite positive and were remarkably similar to the findings obtained in 2009. The principles of One Council appeared to be embedded as there was an increase in perceptions of cross team/departments working relationships however the spending review, cuts and change issues appeared to have had a slight impact on career opportunities and overall satisfaction.

Margaret Newman continued that the key areas for further investigation and improvement had been identified as training and career development, harassment and bullying and strengthening of relationships with other departments. With that in view, a draft action plan including road shows had been drawn up with training facilitators expected to be in place early May 2011. The following areas would be covered within the draft action plan;

- Staff engagement
- Training and career opportunities
- Senior management/leadership
- Improving perception of good working relationships across departments
- Pay and benefits as a corporate project
- Review of harassment, bullying and discrimination policy to ensure zero tolerance.

RESOLVED:-

that the results of the staff survey be noted.

6. Performance and Finance Review, Quarter 3, 2010/11

The Committee received a report that summarised Brent Council's budget position, expenditure, activity data and performance trends for the quarter and recommends action where appropriate. The purpose of the report was to provide a corporate overview of financial and performance information in order to aid the decision-making process and effectively manage risk.

In introducing the report, Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director, Strategy Partnership and Improvement) stated that in the current economic outlook and the radical changes proposed by central government, difficult decisions were required to be taken over the coming years with corporate priorities being continually re-evaluated. She added that given the challenge to balance reduced funding despite the anticipated sustained increase in demand for services (particularly by the most vulnerable) there was a need for prudent financial planning and continuous improved performance in order to preserve service quality and provision for the medium term.

Cathy Tyson informed the Committee that the Council had adopted a transitional set of Vital Signs indicators to accurately reflect its current priorities and keep in line with the changing needs of residents which would be further revised in line with the new Corporate Strategy. Members noted that of the Vital Signs, 59% were currently on target (green star) or just below target (blue circle), a three percent increase from last quarter; 24% were well below target (red triangle) compared to 23% last quarter.

In responding to members' questions, Cathy Tyson stated that as a further step in reducing Co2 emissions, an energy adviser would be appointed to all schools to advise them on energy conservation. In respect of street lighting she stated although PFI contracts had been rolled out already, steps were being taken to put in place dynamic systems for tracking hourly usage and that the use of dimmer switches were being explored. In response for an update on the Youth Inclusion Programme (YIP) Jacqueline Casson informed members that a task group had been established which was looking into the prevention of offending and would be reporting to the Children and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED:-

that the report be noted.

7. The future of performance management in Brent

Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director, Strategy Partnership and Improvement) gave a presentation to the Committee on the future of performance management in Brent. In outlining the reasons for change in performance management in Brent, Cathy Tyson stated that Brent was already within a new working environment and with performance management variable across the organisation and in some areas showing signs of decline, there was every need to be open and transparent about performance and collaborative to drive through improvement. In order to achieve the change, Brent as an organisation would need to strengthen its governance arrangements with much simpler reporting mechanisms such as performance scorecards to improve internal monitoring arrangements and to refine service planning process by streamlining performance planning for each department. These processes would link in with the HR Talent Management System with on-line automated appraisal system.

Cathy Tyson outlined the key principles as individual responsibility to ensure that the Council achieved high performance the need to get the data to enable us to achieve high performance right first time and in a robust way. She continued that a new culture would need to be embedded with strong interventionist leadership, more structured accountability mechanism and high level monitoring for scrutiny, challenge, support and review. The new model was designed to help the organisation by providing a more coherent strategy for managing performance, increasing accountability, embedding a strong performance management culture across the entire organisation and strengthening evidence-based decision making. The model would help managers by encouraging them to build performance management routines into their daily activities, giving them the right tools to

become more performance oriented and cost-aware and putting them in firm control to enable them to maximise their chances of success.

In responding to members' questions, Cathy Tyson confirmed that the Council had sufficient resources to train its staff to ensure that the achievement of performance management. She added that the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had made available the list of national and local indicators which would need to be built into the process to ensure delivery and success.

RESOLVED:-

that the report on the future of performance management in Brent be noted.

8. Any Other Urgent Business

None.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The date of next meeting will be confirmed after the Council meeting on 16 May 2011.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm

R COLWILL
Vice-Chair (in the Chair)