



MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING OF THE ONE COUNCIL, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARTNERSHIP AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES
Thursday, 2 June 2011 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Van Kalwala (Chair) and Councillors Aden, Al-Ebadi, Ashraf, Beckman, Chohan, Gladbaum, Harrison, Hirani, McLennan, Mistry, Mitchell Murray, Naheerathan, HB Patel, HM Patel, Sheth, Dr Levison and Brent Youth Parliament representatives

Also Present: Councillors Arnold (Lead Member for Children and Families), John (Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Corporate Strategy and Policy Co-ordination) and Mashari.

1. Appointment of chair

Nominations were invited for the position of Chair for the Joint Meeting of the One Council, Children and Young People and Partnership and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Councillor Van Kalwala was proposed and seconded. There were no other nominations.

RESOLVED:-

that Councillor Van Kalwala be elected Chair of the Joint Meeting of the One Council, Children and Young People and Partnership and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

2. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

3. Brent's Evidence Base

Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director – Policy, Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) gave a presentation on the key factors arising from the borough's evidence base. She began by highlighting the discrepancy between the Greater London Authority's estimate of Brent's 2011 population of 283,040 and the Office of National Statistics' estimate of 253,400. It was of particular importance to ensure residents completed the Census to reflect Brent's true population. Cathy Tyson then described some of the key trends of the borough's demographics, including the fact that the population was relatively young and that 58% of the population were of Black or Asian Minority ethnic, of which 32% were of Indian ethnicity. Turning to Brent's general health profile of 2010, Cathy Tyson informed Members that life expectancy overall was similar to the national average, however there were significant inequalities within these figures, including an eight year gap amongst men between the least and most

deprived wards. Rates of new cases for tuberculosis, diabetes and early deaths from heart disease were all above the England average, whilst overall those doing regular physical activity rates were comparatively low. It was noted that female life expectancy was higher than males in all wards. Child poverty was a growing concern and this would have a knock-on effect as poor children were most likely to become poor adults and much effort was being directed at addressing this through early years intervention and in developing an interagency child poverty strategy. Poverty was defined by any household that had 60% or less of national average income and this was particularly prevalent in Kilburn, Harlesden and Stonebridge wards, whilst there were also pockets of poverty in Barnhill and Preston wards.

With regard to housing, Cathy Tyson stated that a key issue in Brent was affordability as it was the third lowest in terms of income of all boroughs in London, whilst having the sixth highest average property price and the second highest in West London. The housing benefit cap would also have a significant impact in Brent and a key component of the One Council programme was in addressing housing issues and tackling homelessness as this would present a huge challenge, especially as there was to be less funding available for affordable housing. Members noted the decreasing employment rates since the economic downturn and there were also less attempts to find work due to diminishing incentives, whilst the number of those claiming the Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) was rising and the considerable variation in JSA claimants in Brent wards was noted, as was the fact that approximately 30,000 Brent residents received some form of benefit. In particular, there had been a significant increase in incapacity benefit claimants, however changes to the assessment criteria would have an impact. One positive trend that had been identified was the rise of those in self-employment. However, both unemployment and housing would continue to be key issues and pose a considerable challenge. Members noted the pattern of incomes and the index of multiple deprivation (IMD) comparison of 2007 and 2010. The IMD was worsening in these three years and Brent was the 52nd most deprived borough in the UK, which put it in the top ten per cent of poorest nationally.

During discussion by Members, Councillor Gladbaum enquired whether statistical figures were available for those not in education, employment and training (NEETs). Councillor H B Patel welcomed the efforts being made to ensure an accurate Census and commented on the need to educate residents with regard to the rise in diabetes, tuberculosis and heart disease. Councillor McLennan advised that each cluster of GPs in Brent had appointed a GP to lead on tackling diabetes and an action plan was being developed. Councillor Ashraf enquired how the demographic data was collected in view of the complexities involved, such as the considerable movement of people into and out of the borough. A Brent Youth Parliament representative enquired if there were any details available with regard to physical exercise amongst the young.

The Chair asked what measures the council and its partners were taking to tackle the key issues in the borough, including employment opportunities. In respect of transport links, he sought details as to how this may impact upon finding employment and whether it may also encourage some residents to relocate elsewhere with better transport links or closer to their workplace. He also sought further comments in respect of the future impact on housing.

In reply, Cathy Tyson advised that the proportion of those classified as NEETs in Brent was lower than the national average and there had been some success in keeping young people in education and training. She agreed to arrange for data on this issue to be provided to Councillor Gladbaum. Members heard that diabetes was considerably above the national average and there were educational factors to consider. It was hoped that there would be improvements in this area as the partnership with Brent NHS developed. Members heard that information was compiled both from national agencies and by the council to provide the most accurate evidence base possible. Information was also obtained from the Client Index and the council's GIS Team undertook work to refine and understand the data collected. The relationship with Brent NHS was important in obtaining information on health indicators. With regard to regular physical exercise amongst young people, Cathy Tyson advised that this was around the national average and there had been recent improvements in this area due to various initiatives including work with schools and promoting swimming in the borough. She explained that the council needed to take a robust approach in ensuring that the employment agencies were fulfilling their role in providing employment opportunities and scrutiny would play a vital part in holding these agencies to account. Some residents also needed to be encouraged of the need to be prepared to travel further for work than they were currently. There had been significant lobbying in respect of the housing benefit changes, however important decisions needed to be made as to how to manage demand. Private sector housing contractors would also need to be approached with regard to this, particularly in respect of providing larger properties.

4. The Localism Bill

Cathy Tyson gave a short presentation on the implications and responses to the Localism Bill. The key provisions of the Bill focused included:-

- General power of competence
- Removal of ring-fenced grants
- Changes to governance arrangements
- Public referendum
- Removal of the Comprehensive Area Assessment and inspection regimes
- Right to challenge to provide services and manage community assets
- Neighbourhood development orders and changes to planning
- Housing reform

Cathy Tyson referred to comments from the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government concerning what the Localism Bill was set out to achieve. The Bill raised a number of possible implications, such as its role with regard to strengthening local democracy, the impact on the traditional institutions of local decision-making, the legal basis for the communities envisioned in the Bill, whether these provisions are necessary and the risks of litigation, additional costs and inflexible processes. In terms of the council's response to the Bill, consideration needed to be given with regard to using the general power of competence to deliver regeneration objectives, use of locality services and ward working, the virtual council, community based budgets, developing relationships with the voluntary sector, strategic communications and a fundamental review of activities.

During discussion, Dr Levison commented that local democracy sometimes raised expectations unrealistically and he felt that there was a need for more honesty and to explain that there are limits to what local democracy can achieve. With regard to the general power of competence, Councillor Hirani enquired in what way this was different to the powers the council currently possessed. Councillor H B Patel felt that every effort should be made to take advantage of any opportunities the Bill and the delegation of some powers to local authorities may provide. He added that these opportunities may allow the council to create effective solutions to a number of issues.

The Chair commented that it was still unclear as to what precisely localism is and that it was not desirable for the Government to dictate what this should be. Every effort should be made by the council to influence what localism should mean for Brent and the Chair added that there appeared to be elements within the Localism Bill which appeared to undermine local powers, such as the loss of some planning powers for local authorities.

In reply to the issues raised, Cathy Tyson advised that there were a number of ways in which the general power of competence changed the powers available to local authorities and this was also not without contradictions. An example of a possible change was that the council would in theory be able to join a group with other local authorities to provide mutual insurance, a move that had been outruled by the courts previously on the grounds of creating an unfair monopoly. Cathy Tyson suggested that the Bill had not been designed with an urban area of Brent's nature in mind and that there was a need for mediation and reconciliation to address the conflicting needs of the borough. There were also elements of the Bill that appeared to be moving away from local democracy and powers, such as local authorities combining to share management of services.

Phil Newby (Director of Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) added that there were a number of contradictions within the Localism Bill which appeared to be driven by the savings determined by the Treasury. An example of this contradiction was encouraging local authorities to integrate more, whilst also expecting smaller organisations to run services. In addition, the Secretary of State under the current proposal would have an additional 142 opportunities to intervene in local decisions. Scrutiny needed to be aware of the consequences of the Bill and of the major policy contradictions.

5. Leader's update on council priorities

Councillor John (Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Corporate Strategy and Policy Co-ordination) set out the council's priorities for 2011-12. She began by referring to the Localism Bill which she felt may be detrimental to local democracy as it encouraged cross borough initiatives which would make decision-making less local. It could also lead to employing a greater proportion of people who were not local. Turning to the budget, Councillor John highlighted the exceptional circumstances the council faced which required it to make £100 million savings in four years. Furthermore, these savings were front loaded with the greater proportion needing to be made in the first two years, meaning that a number of decisions needed to be made quickly. This had led to a number of local authorities of all political composition expressing disquiet at the haste decisions had needed to

be made. Councillor John referred to the big decisions that had recently been made in respect of libraries and waste and recycling. This included the objective of significantly increase recycling rates which was not only important for environmental reasons but was made even more necessary because of increasing landfill taxes year on year. Improves services to residents had also been provided by offering removal of free bulky waste. In respect of day centres, the changes made were in line with the national move to personalisation and this would continue.

Councillor John advised that £24 million savings were required for the 2011-12 budget and the One Council programme was leading on this with the aim of delivering both savings and increasing efficiency. She acknowledged the impact made as a result of staff losses and that in many cases this involved local people who were faced with difficult situations. However, the council remained committed to helping the community. Amongst the main initiatives to achieve the savings and efficiencies included reviewing procurement and contract arrangements and joint working with six other London boroughs in respect of adult social care. Other difficult decisions would need to be made and not all savings could be achieved through the One Council programme or through changes to procurement and contracts. Members noted that school crossing patrols was one of the activities currently under consultation. Turning to the role of scrutiny, Councillor John commented that it had undertaken an abundance of good work and Members found it rewarding. She encouraged Members to engage fully with scrutiny activities and stated that the work undertaken by the various overview and scrutiny committees was appreciated.

Councillor John then set out the main areas the council would be focusing on. Regeneration opportunities would continue to be pursued, such as the development of Wembley including Wembley City, the building of the Civic Centre and the role the council and its partners will play in the 2012 Olympics. A presentation on the Olympics would take place at the Council meeting on 11 July and the Olympic torch route would include Brent and torch bearers were being sought. More needed to be done to protect the environment and in addition to implementing the new waste and recycling strategy, a commitment had been made to reduce CO2 emissions. Housing faced challenging circumstances with changes to funding of affordable housing. There may also be changes to Planning which would make it easier for objections to be made to applications which could hinder affordable housing schemes. Another objective was to ensure residents had all the tools required to gain employment and the role of the College of North West London, as well as the council, was pivotal to this. Changes to Government policy meant that schools could choose to leave local authorities, however if they took this course of action they would be subject to central Government control. Councillor John reported that Brent was no longer a trident borough and the level of violent crime had reduced. The Health and Social Care Bill had been delayed as it was subject to further consultation and debate, however the council would need to look at how it worked with its partners in future to deliver services. A Shadow Health and Well Being Board had been established with a view to the Board becoming an Executive function with the council and its partners in the following year. However, the council would face a number of challenges as public health transferred to the responsibility of the local authority.

During discussion, Councillor Gladbaum enquired whether construction of the Civic Centre was on track. Councillor H B Patel commented that the savings required were inevitable and that there could be grounds for optimism for the opportunities open to the council from the changes resulting from the Localism and Health and Social Care Bills. Councillor Ashraf, in acknowledging the challenges the council faced, emphasised the importance of Members working well as a scrutiny group and in providing support to ensure the council was working effectively.

The Chair concurred with Councillor Ashraf's comments and thanked Councillor John for her presentation.

In reply to Councillor Gladbaum's query, Councillor John confirmed that the Civic Centre was on schedule, helped by the recent good weather, although construction may be hindered over the course of the Olympics and negotiations with the Olympic organisers would be required. She added that Members would receive regular updates on the civic centre.

6. The Overview and Scrutiny work programme

The Chair informed Members that this item would be considered through a group session for discussion and suggestions for the work programme for the three overview and scrutiny committees that had attended the joint meeting. Members then made a number of suggestions during the group session for future consideration.

7. Date of next meetings

It was noted that the next meeting of the One Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Wednesday, 6 July at 7.30 pm, the next meeting of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday, 12 July 2011 at 7.00 pm and the next meeting of the Partnership and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday, 26 July at 7.30 pm respectively.

8. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm

Z VAN KALWALA
Chair