



MINUTES OF THE PARTNERSHIP AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 26 July 2011 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Van Kalwala (Chair), Councillor Clues (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Harrison, Hirani, Naheerathan and HB Patel

Also Present: Councillor Jones

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

Councillor Hirani declared an interest regarding item 5, Registered Social Landlord Performance, as he was a board member of Fortunegate Housing.

2. Deputations

There were no deputations.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting held on Tuesday 5 April 2011

The minutes of the previous meeting held on Tuesday 5 April 2011 were approved as a correct record.

4. Matters arising

Referring to the item on the employment and skills agenda in Brent, Councillor Hirani queried if there was any update regarding the working programme. Cathy Tyson advised that Brent had a positive working relationship with the contractors and at present work providers had the opportunity to bid for additional funds via the EFS.

Councillor HB Patel noted that with regard to the item on the Cultural Strategy for Brent, it had been highlighted at the previous meeting that the Culture, Sport and Learning Forum, which had drawn up the strategy, had not included any faith, community or voluntary sector groups. He subsequently queried if any progress had been made in consulting any of these groups. Joanna McCormick advised that the strategy had been put to the voluntary sector working party and the Brent Forum. In terms of its delivery it had also been put before the Brent Strategic Forum. The Chair of the Culture, Sport and Learning Forum was presently developing the website to promote Brent.

5. Registered Social Landlord Performance

Councillor Hirani declared an interest as he was on the board of Fortunegate housing.

Tony Hirsch (Head of Policy and Performance) presented a report updating the committee on the average performance of the Joint Commissioning Registered Social Landlords (RSL) during 2010/2011. The report outlined performance information for a number of areas including antisocial behaviour, repairs, lettings, complaints and member enquiries, governance, tenant satisfaction, decent homes and grounds maintenance. Tony Hirsch advised that the report arose out of work with Brent's West London Local Authority partners and Joint Commissioning partners, to address concerns regarding performance. He added that this did not include all of the council's housing partners. In addition, as the performance data was collated from a range of organisations all of which had different policies, practices and means of measuring performance, it was not always possible to obtain all areas of information from all organisations.

Following his introduction of the report, Tony Hirsch drew members' attention to paragraph 5 which listed a number of housing reforms proposed within the Localism Bill, and the implications of these for the local authority. These proposals included the introduction of the Affordable Rent tenancy for Registered Providers, which allowed RSL's to charge rents of up to 80% of market levels; A new "flexible tenancy" for local authorities, providing greater leeway regarding the term of future tenancies; A duty on councils to publish a strategic tenancy policy; Greater flexibility for local authorities to manage waiting lists and other measures to facilitate moves within the social housing sector, and; the ability for local authorities to discharge a homelessness duty into the private rented sector without the applicant's agreement. Tony Hirsch advised that as the strategic housing authority, the council would have an interest in how these proposals were implemented both by providers and internally within the council. Consequently, the council might wish to review its approach to monitoring the comparative performance of providers and the committee was asked to consider if there were other areas for which it wished to see performance data. The committee further heard that officers were currently working to develop a Tenancy Strategy and a report was due to go to the Policy Coordination Group shortly.

Parallel to this process, partner organisations would also be considering their responses. Draft guidance to the Regulator also envisaged a greater role for tenants to empower them to be involved in the scrutiny of their landlord's performance. This was supported by guidance stipulating that registered providers should welcome scrutiny via a tenant panel, should be required to provide timely, useful performance information to tenants in order to support effective scrutiny and to submit an annual report of performance to tenants.

The Chair welcomed Dave Woods (Development Director – Octavia Housing) and Eusebio Barata (Chief Executive - Stadium Housing) and invited them to comment on the challenges posed to RSLs by the proposed housing reforms. Dave Woods advised that significant changes to the funding climate had/would result in great challenges for RSLs in developing further housing provision. Specifically, reduced funding opportunities/grants from central government would mean that RSLs would be required to borrow greater sums and increase rental charges to fund further development. This in turn would lead to more modest housing development programmes being followed. At present, Octavia housing had a bid with the HCA to develop 600 homes in London, with rents to be charged at 60% of the market rate. Dave Woods noted that Octavia Housing's policy was aimed at trying to ensure that properties remained affordable for those in receipt of Universal Benefit. An

affordable rent model encompassing part buy/part rent schemes was in place for smaller properties to target those entering the buyer's market for the first time.

Eusebio Barata (Chief Executive of Stadium Housing) added that in terms of funding, Stadium Housing had been advised that it was a good lending prospect but had been cautioned with regard to expanding or assuming greater risk. A significant outcome of the housing reforms would be the pursuance by RSLs of a wider range of different types of housing development projects and, in addition to this, a greater differential in rental prices. Stadium Housing intended to work with stakeholders to ensure that the reasons for such changes were understood.

Eusebio Barata advised that a further issue of great significance to RSLs was the departure from the issuing of life-long tenancies. It was anticipated that this would have a considerable impact on the social housing market and could also affect how RSLs envisaged their roles within a community. RSLs were currently having to decide upon the criteria for reviewing flexible tenancies, as this had to be set out within the terms of tenancy agreements from the time they commenced. A further factor requiring immediate decisions to be made by RSLs regarding these criteria was they need to commit to delivering certain revenues as part of funding bids. As local authorities had one year from the date that the Localism Bill was enacted to establish a Tenure and Tenancy Strategy, RSL partners currently had to make decisions on these criteria within a political vacuum. Eusebio Barata acknowledged that this might lead to tensions later on if the criteria set by RSLs were not in accord with the local authority's strategy.

A number of issues were raised during members' discussion. Councillor Naheerathan commented that in many developments the size of the rooms were very small. He further noted that with changes to the housing benefit system, Brent would experience an influx of people who could not afford to live in other parts of London and added that he felt that Brent needed to adopt a strong approach to this issue. Councillor Harrison noted that housing benefit was now paid direct to claimants rather than their landlords and queried whether any issues had arisen from this change.

In response to the queries raised, Dave Woods explained that Octavia Housing had two types of schemes; those for which a separate developer was contracted and those where Octavia Housing acted as the developer. In the former, a contracted developer might often build to minimum standards; Octavia Housing however, built to 10% above the minimum standards. He added that the Mayor of London had retained the London plan which stipulated that new developments were required to be built to 10-15% above the national minimum standards and that all new schemes had to conform to this plan. As a result of the London plan, it was likely that there would be fewer new developments in the future but that those built would be of a higher quality.

Addressing the question of the impact of a potential inflow of people to Brent resulting from the changes to the housing benefit system, Eusebio Barata advised that Stadium Housing was currently in dialogue with the council regarding the level of rents to be charged, noting that this would largely be influenced by how the project in question was funded. Ultimately, it was likely that there would be a range of higher and lower priced properties, depending on a range of factors. It was anticipated that in some areas on average rent levels charged by Stadium Housing

would equate to 80% of the market rate; however, in other areas it would be approximately 60% of the market rate. Rental charges would vary according to what Stadium Housing determined could be reasonably achieved from residents. Eusebio Barata added that the Local Housing Allowance should prevent an excessive burden being placed on housing benefit and that considerable work across the UK was conducted to prevent fraudulent housing benefit claims. Tony Hirsch highlighted that housing benefit was a national policy and that it was important that Brent develop its tenancy strategy with due consideration to the approaches adopted by other London boroughs.

Councillor Hirani sought further information regarding the number of three and four bedroom properties being developed. Eusebio Barata advised that Stadium Housing would be excluding properties of three bedrooms and larger from the affordable rent model and consequently there should be no adverse effect on families in receipt of housing benefit. However, Stadium Housing would be reducing provision of three to four bedroom properties, as the economic model did not work for larger families. Tony Hirsch advised that both the Mayor of London and Brent Council's strategy emphasised the current need for the development of larger homes but that this demand was not at present being met for Brent or London as a whole. Unfortunately, changes to the way in which RSLs could access funding for developing housing provision would not help to ensure a greater number of larger properties were built.

Councillor Hirani commented that where rental charges increase for social housing but remain at affordable levels for those in receipt of housing benefit, the cost of housing benefit would increase overall. He added that most people in Brent who were in receipt of housing benefit were currently in work and suggested that the Committee ask that this be examined by the Executive. The Chair advised that officers were at present engaged in work regarding this issue and that a report would be presented shortly to the Budget and Finance Committee. Tony Hirsch added that this would be considered within the development of the council's Tenancy Strategy, a draft of which would be distributed for consultation in September. Cathy Tyson added that this was a critical policy area and that the council was currently collecting data and mapping trends regarding the impact of the housing reforms. She added that the people moving into an area placed pressure on a range of services, beyond just those of housing.

Turning to the question of repairs and maintenance, Councillor Naheerathan commented that a considerable number of repairs and maintenance issues required referral by a Councillor before being resolved. Councillor Patel queried if there was any information regarding the numbers of repairs required due to irresponsible use or intentional damage to properties by tenants. Eusebio Barata commented that most organisations would have an appropriate split between responsive repairs and planned maintenance and that it was in the interests of a landlord to maintain a property. It was highlighted that the number of repairs and maintenance works were in the tens of thousands and that the number of referrals from councillors was comparatively minor. With regard to emergency repairs, these could encompass a range of different circumstances, including repairs or replacements required because something had reached the end of its natural life. It was anticipated that damage caused by tenant abuse had had a revenue cost of £500k for Stadium Housing. Attempts were made to recharge the tenants responsible for such damage; however, this was often difficult to do successfully. In severe cases,

tenant abuse of a property could result in the loss of the tenancy. For programmes of planned maintenance, despite significant sums of money being directed towards various projects, demand for works was still greater. The committee was advised for instance that Stadium Housing had been conducting a programme of bathroom and kitchen renovation on which £850k had been spent so far; despite this, there were many people still waiting. As part of an organisation's asset management strategy, it would be considered whether it was in the best interest of the RSL to repair or sell the property.

Councillor Patel sought additional details of the level of rents that would be charged by RSLs in relation to future housing developments. Councillor Clues sought further details regarding the criteria likely to be established to review flexible tenancies. Eusebio Barata advised that the criteria for reviewing fixed-term tenancies which was currently being decided upon by RSLs might include; the suitability of the property in relation to the tenants, for example property and family size; the behaviour of the resident towards the property and their neighbours and possibly economic circumstances. With regard to the latter criterion, it was acknowledged that there was some concern that including a condition of this nature might act to de-incentivise some tenants from improving their economic situation. RSLs were currently examining the range of possible criteria and Stadium Housing was holding discussions to garner residents' views. He noted that the flexible tenancies could be between two and five years although Ministers had indicated that a two year tenancy would be expected to be used only in exceptional circumstances. He further explained that RSLs had the option to make no changes to the length or terms of tenancies.

Councillor Clues further queried what form tenant empowerment would assume following the implementation of the proposed housing reforms and further to this, what contingencies, both in terms of the provision of support and financial contingencies, had been established to deal with issues arising out of tenants failing to pay rent and falling into debt. Councillor Patel asked what actions would be taken by RSLs to tackle issues arising from domestic violence and antisocial behaviour. Eusebio Barata explained that it was anticipated that there would be an increase of tenant bad debt in the foreseeable future due to a range of factors including housing reforms and changes to the housing benefit system. As a consequence Stadium Housing would be doubling its debt provision for its affordable housing model. RSLs catered for lots of vulnerable tenants and in addition to housing reforms, other changes to public services, including the cessation of many supportive services could lead to poor outcomes for such tenants. Tenant bad debt could eventually result in evictions and in turn, a greater pressure on homelessness. Stadium Housing offered a range of support services to tenants. Eusebio Barata highlighted that the expected increase in vulnerable tenants would lead to higher levels of incidences of domestic violence and anti-social behaviour. In order to effectively tackle such issues it was important that landlords reported these incidents. It was felt that the greater numbers of domestic violence incidences recorded by Stadium Housing reflected better reporting procedures. Tony Hirsch added that it would be of greater concern where there were no recorded incidences of domestic violence.

Eusebio Barata further advised that the model for tenant empowerment that RSLs were required to adopt, closely followed on from the move towards co-regulation of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). Whilst approaches would vary between

organisations, RSLs were required to demonstrate that tenants were provided with adequate opportunity to develop effective scrutiny. Stadium Housing had created eight neighbourhoods which together covered its total area of operation. Each neighbourhood had a neighbourhood Panel, the aim of which was to scrutinise Stadium Housing and the use of the budget for the area. These Panel's had been established in April 2011 and were still evolving; currently 62 residents were taking part.

The Chair queried whether RSLs could benefit from engaging in partnerships to provide further housing developments which would allow the associated risk to be spread between the partners. He further queried whether RSLs could just manage housing developments and not act as the developer. He sought further details regarding the expected length of the flexible tenancies. With regard to the performance data provided within the report, the Chair commented that comparison data for previous years should be provided.

In response to the questions raised by the Chair, Dave Woods advised that organisations could use the sale of properties to subsidise the development of properties for the social housing market. This was echoed by Eusebio Barata who further noted that the increase in the cost of borrowing further restricted options, however, in the past other options pursued included where the local authority had gifted land or use had been made of 106 agreement payments. He further explained that some small RSLs did not act as a developer; however, most RSLs were predicated on supplying units and if they did not do this it was likely that the local authority would have fewer units to let and would have to assume the risk of developing additional housing units. Partnerships with the local authority and other partners had worked previously. Tony Hirsch advised that local authorities could cease to operate an open waiting list for social housing and could put in place a qualification demanding that an applicant live or work in the borough. A further qualification that could be put in place was that for those applicant's with no realistic chance of success be excluded from the waiting lists. As there would be many implications of implementing any such qualifications, officers would be exploring all options before bringing a recommendation to members.

The Chair thanked Dave Woods and Eusebio Barata for attending the meeting and answering the members' questions.

The Chair requested that for future reports BHP provide their performance data and Tony Hirsch advised that he would ensure this took place.

RESOLVED: -

- i. that the report be noted
- ii. that future performance reports include comparison data for previous years.
- iii. that the proposals for housing reform, set out in sections 5 of the report, and the potential impact on future performance reporting, be noted

6. Ward Working May 2010 - May 2011

The Chair welcomed Councillor Jones, Lead Member for Customers and Citizens, to the meeting. Christine Collins, Neighbourhood Working Manager, presented a report to the committee detailing the work of the Ward Working Team for May 2010

to May 2011. The Ward Working Team operated across all 21 wards to support elected members in their contact with ward residents, helping to identify and respond to local concerns and secure long term improvements in the way services were delivered at neighbourhood level. The team worked with colleagues across the council as well as external partners to develop projects to tackle residents' concerns and to develop strategic responses to issues of greater complexity. This was reflected in the Ward Working Steering group which comprised representatives from all Council departments. The team also reported direct to the Ward Working Member Reference Group (MRG) of which Councillor Jones was Chair and Councillors Colwill and Sneddon members. The report outlined expenditure, results of consultations, partnership activity, challenges faced by the team, positive achievements and issues to be addressed in the forthcoming year.

Christine Collins explained that the Ward Working Team had been affected by reductions in other council departments. These reductions could limit the options for the projects that the team might wish to develop. Despite this, the team had participated in 43 outreach events including ward walkabouts and attended tenant and resident groups meetings, police Safer Neighbourhood Team meetings and developed 'ward breakouts' at Area Consultative Forums. With regard to communications, the team had continued to produce the Neighbourhood bulletin, although had slightly changed the format to encourage greater levels of feedback, and had started using Twitter in a pilot scheme for Kilburn residents. There had been some significant interest in this pilot scheme but there required further work to encourage council departments to include more information.

Christine Collins further advised that a wide range of partnerships had been established and developed by the Ward Working Team and 17 of these were currently on-going, alongside more informal partnership working. Resident consultations had produced 597 responses, received via festivals and tear-off slips from the neighbourhood bulletin. These responses had been collated and analysed at Appendix 1 to the report. The information gathered was used to assist ward members to identify priorities for their ward and to aid decisions regarding project ideas. Of the £420,000 budget for all wards, there remained a small underspend of £7,530. At paragraph 9.2 of the report, a table was provided detailing the various categories of projects funded via the ward budgets. The greatest proportion of funds was directed towards projects aimed at engaging young people and in total £223,250 was spent on projects in the voluntary and community sector. A timetable had been implemented for the current financial year indicating when decisions regarding funding allocations should be made, in order to spread expenditure throughout the year and avoid difficulties caused by last minute allocations. It was highlighted to members that there had been many achievements and issues tackled for certain areas without direct funding, including the removal of graffiti, the introduction of traffic calming measures and improved security and lighting to deter antisocial behaviour.

Christine Collins concluded that the Ward Working Team had now become part of the Community Engagement Department, along with the Consultation and Diversity teams. It was felt that this would offer new opportunities for joint working, project development and cross-team learning.

Councillor Jones added that there had been a number of challenges for the past year, including the introduction of new elected members and a number of politically

split wards; however, both Ward Members and the Ward Working Team had worked well and Councillor Jones expressed her hope that all of the ward working budget would be allocated in the current year. It was further highlighted that due to the significant cuts to public spending it was likely that there would be many projects and organisations seeking alternative funding options. Unfortunately, the criteria for the allocation of funds from the ward working budget stipulated that projects must be discrete and revenue funding must not be provided. Councillor Jones further advised that it was hoped that the ward working budget could be increased as it was felt to be very important in encouraging and facilitating engagement between ward members and residents.

During Members discussion several councillors expressed their thanks to the Ward Working Team and a number of queries were raised. Councillor Harrison sought further details regarding the opportunities that would be afforded by the Ward Working Team joining the Community Engagement Department, alongside the Consultation and Diversity teams. Christine Collins advised that the consultation team advised all council departments on how to conduct consultations; it was hoped therefore, that by working more closely with this team, the ward working team would be able to build on its current knowledge and seek to influence the way in which consultations are carried out to allow information to be broken down to a ward level. With regard to the Diversity team who provided advice to council departments on equality impact assessments, it was felt that greater knowledge of equality issues could only improve the work of the Ward Working Team. Councillor Harrison further commented that the meetings of the area consultative forums (ACFs) clashed with council committee meetings and Christine Collins assured the meeting that she understood that ACF meetings were scheduled to avoid clashes with council committee meetings as much as was possible. Further to this, Councillor Naheerathan queried why the Ward Working Team had changed departments. Councillor Jones advised that restructures had taken place across several departments as part of efficiency measures. Christine Collins confirmed that the number of neighbourhood co-ordinators and the function of the team remained as before.

With reference to the table at paragraph 9.2 of the report, Councillor Naheerathan further queried whether the street improvements which accounted for £76,835 of the expenditure from the ward working budget, should have been carried out and funded by the highways team. Christine Collins explained that the projects funded via the ward working budgets have to target works over and above what the council would provide. Included within the street improvements was a number of alley gating projects, which had been extremely successful.

Noting the Paan Spitting Steering group from amongst the list of partnerships included at Appendix 2 to the report, Councillor Naheerathan queried how successful this partnership had been. Christine Collins advised that the ward working team had contributed to the related campaign a few years previously. The campaign had gone through several stages including street cleaning, the erection of banners, work by trading standards with regard to Paan sellers and police actions on the street; however, none of these stages had proved particularly successful. The NHS had been going to run a campaign regarding the health effects of Paan spitting, unfortunately this had not yet taken place due to the significant changes affecting the health service. There had been no recent work by the Paan Spitting Steering group.

Councillor Patel queried what would happen to the £7,000 underspend, whether there would be any reductions to the Ward Working Team due to efficiency savings and sought further details regarding the alley gating schemes supported by the team. Councillor Jones advised that the Ward Working Team was currently working to capacity and asserted that there would be no reductions in the team. Christine Collins explained that the underspend in the budget would contribute to the council's required savings. With regard to the alley gating scheme, she further explained that depending on the circumstances one or several gates of varying types might have been installed. Councillor Hirani queried how future repair issues regarding the gates would be resolved. Councillor Jones advised that Ward Working funding had to be for discrete projects only and Christine Collins added that when the alley gates were installed resident groups were established to maintain the gates. In order to take action with respect to the gates, those resident groups would be required to get agreement of all who use the gates.

The Chair sought further details regarding the impact of reductions to other departments on the work of the Ward Working Team. Christine Collins provided several examples to illustrate the impact of such reductions. The reduction or loss of some teams or functions represented a loss of expertise, or a loss of contacts with outside organisations. Councillor Jones highlighted that it might also lead to delays for the Ward Working Team as waiting times for information or services might increase; such delay's, for example, had been evident in the process of obtaining quotes from the Parks Service.

The Chair, with reference to the Localism Bill, queried how ward working would progress in the future. Councillor Jones reiterated that it was intended to increase the Ward Working budget; however, this was only an aspiration at the current time due to the financial context of significant cuts to public spending. Further to this, the Chair queried whether Ward Working was organised differently in other local authorities. Christine Collins confirmed that different local authorities had individual arrangements and noted that some did not have an equivilant scheme. For example Budgets for ward working ranged considerably and arrangements for allocating the funds also varied, with some authorities having a shopping list that members could refer to or a requirement that a ward walkabout be completed by councillors before a bid for a monthly sum for use in that ward would be accepted. With regard to the responses received to the team's consultations, the Chair noted that responses were low from certain groups within ward communities and asked whether members could assist with improving this. He added that it would be useful for members to be made aware for their wards where responses were low for certain ethnic or age groups.

RESOLVED: -

That the report be noted.

7. Partnership Working in Brent (presentation)

Joanna McCormick (Partnerships Co-Ordinator) delivered a presentation to the committee on Partnership Working in Brent and what it could deliver in practice, outlining the key policy drivers, responses to these and recent partnership projects. Copies of an accompanying hand-out were distributed to members.

Joanna McCormick advised that at a local level, policy drivers to Partnership Working were drawn from the corporate strategy, 'Brent Our Future 2010-2014' and were underpinned by in-depth analysis of a range of data and by feedback obtained via scrutiny of the council and its partners. In a national context, the Localism Bill, the Open Public Services White Paper and the Health and Social Care Bill set the scene for a significant shift in the nature of the relationship with the state. The Localism Bill for example, envisaged an expanded role for the voluntary sector, granted a general power of competence to local authorities allowing a greater flexibility, and proposed a community assets scheme. In response to these policy drivers, partnership working in Brent had focussed on assessing what could be achieved collectively. Examples of successful partnership working included the employer partnership supply chain scheme, which helped local businesses to access opportunities presented by projects such as the development of the new civic centre, and the creation and implementation of the cultural strategy for Brent, which aimed to raise Brent's profile. Joanna McCormick noted that the Cultural Strategy had now been endorsed by the Partners for Brent Strategic Forum.

Turning to the subject of current challenges for Partnership Working, Joanna McCormick advised that an issue of particular significance was the changing nature of the local authority's relationship with the voluntary sector. Whilst a heightened role was envisaged for the voluntary sector in the delivery of public services, it was noted that many voluntary organisations would have been adversely affected by the cuts to public spending. It was highlighted to the committee that it would be important to ensure that any tensions caused by these circumstances were mitigated and that the council acted to align its approach by providing one point of contact for voluntary sector organisations. The council was currently acting to support the development of a new council for voluntary service (CVS Brent) following the closure of BRAVA. CVS Brent would aid effective communication between the voluntary sector and the council and, where the voluntary sector assumed this role, would help to align service delivery. A further challenge to Partnership Working was the extent of organisational change both within the council and partner organisations. It was acknowledged that with changing contacts, the relationship between the council and its partners could be adversely affected and work was currently being conducted to mitigate this.

Joanna McCormick briefly outlined a number of partnership projects which had been established to meet joint objectives for the borough including tackling fuel poverty, worklessness, housing issues and child poverty. Examples of these projects included the development of a strategy deal with the impact of fuel poverty on the borough; a partnership between the job centre plus and the College for North West London to support individuals in to vocational courses, rather than academic courses, as it had been found that the former could lead to more sustainable work prospects, and; a community safety project which co-ordinated support from a range of different services for repeat callers or victims to achieve more effective outcomes for those individuals. With regard to child poverty in the borough, Joanna McCormick advised that a significant amount of research had been conducted on this issue and currently 34.1% of children within Brent lived in poverty. It was further noted that other data sets could be used to better illustrate this issue including statistics on overcrowding, those not in education, employment or training (NEET), domestic violence, pressure on school places and those

claiming benefits. It was noted for instance that the number of women claiming Job Seekers Allowance had doubled since 2009.

Selecting 'health and well-being' as a joint objective to discuss in-depth with the committee, Joanna McCormick highlighted that there was on going and widespread change in this area. Under the Health and Social Care Bill, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) would be abolished and replaced by Clinical Commissioning Groups by April 2013 and the public health function would transfer to local authorities. To prepare for these changes the Brent Shadow Health and Well Being board had been established and would monitor further changes to this area. Alongside joint commissioning for social care and the health services, the council and its partners were exploring options for further integration of these services.

Joanna McCormick concluded her presentation by detailing two key developments relating to the pooling of resources. The first of these was the establishment of an intelligence hub for Brent, in order to improve the evidence base for partnership working projects and ensure a consistent use of the data by the council and its partners. The second key development was the progress of community based budgeting which national government envisaged could use collective agency resources at several possible levels including borough-wide, at neighbourhood level and on family by family basis. Following 16 initial 'complex family' pilot schemes, the Department for Communities and Local Government was expanding the scheme to an additional 50 local authorities for 2011-12. Joanna McCormick advised that once further details were released regarding the bidding process, Brent was hoping to pursue this. She further advised that the success of the Community Based Budgeting pilots had been twofold; it had improved the collective understanding of the resources available between partners and had allowed responses to be co-ordinated at a strategic level. Community Based Budgeting led to better outcomes for families which presented with a range of issues such as substance misuse, domestic violence, poor school attendance, worklessness and mental health issues. The pilot schemes had demonstrated that in presenting a cohesive set of responses to meet the needs of complex families, possibly coordinated via a key worker, the overall cost was reduced whilst the outcomes were improved. In developing a similar approach in Brent, a number of issues to consider had been in reviewing the schemes, including in particular, the question of how 'complex families' would be defined.

Several issues were raised during members' discussion. Councillor Harrison queried how a co-ordinated response for a family might be triggered. Joanna McCormick advised that existing referral routes could be used, with professionals from a range of related services being appropriately trained to understand what constituted a complex family. Referrals from such professionals would be passed to a team who would then examine the circumstances of that family. Cathy Tyson advised that a critical component of the scheme was the provision of early intervention and preventative services. She emphasised that the scheme envisaged the co-ordination of services already provided by the council and its partners. The better targeting of these services to prevent further escalation of the issues experienced by a family also represented a financial incentive for the council. In response to a query from Councillor Clues, Joanna McCormick advised that there was a level of ambiguity regarding central government's definition of community based budgets and in particular, the definition of 'community'. She added that 'community' could for instance relate to geographical area, a local authority

boundary or even to a group of residents affected by particular issues. . Cathy Tyson added that community budgets also represented a step by central government in creating a distance between itself and local government spending. This followed other steps such as the removal of ringfenced grants via the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and the proposal that local government retain business rates for use in its area. Councillor Hirani sought further details as to how the council would work with its partners to produce a multiagency response. Joanna McCormick advised that the council would build on its already significant experience of working with its partners in this way. Ultimately, it would depend on how the drive for community budgets from central government proceeded. The Chair sought additional information on how the objectives for joint working between the council and the range of partner agencies would be set. Joanna McCormick advised that joint objectives for the borough were agreed by Partners for Brent. The Chair further commented that the council worked with a wide range of partners and that these relationships could be expressed via complex arrangements. Cathy Tyson explained that some partnerships were driven by necessity and some by opportunity.

The Chair requested that an update be provided to the committee on the community based budgets in the spring of 2012.

RESOLVED: -

That the verbal report be noted.

8. The Partnership & Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Chair advised the committee that if they had any suggestions regarding the committee work programme that these be raised at the meeting or forwarded to Jacqueline Casson.

Jacqueline Casson advised that it had been scheduled on the programme for the work programme providers to attend a meeting of the committee. Cathy Tyson advised that she had spoken with them regarding this and they were happy to attend a meeting of the committee.

Councillor Harrison requested that an update be provided on the voluntary sector. Jacqueline Casson advised that a report around this issue would be brought to the committee.

9. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting would be held on 12 October 2011.

10. Any other urgent business

None declared.

The meeting closed at 10.05 pm

VAN KALWALA
Chair