



MINUTES OF THE ONE COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE **Thursday 21 March 2013 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Colwill (Chair) and Councillors Brown (alternate for Councillor Ashraf), Chohan, McLennan, Mitchell Murray and Pavey.

Also present: Councillor J Moher (Lead Member for Highways and Transportation)

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Ashraf, Lorber and Ketan Sheth.

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 6 February 2013

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the last meeting held on 6 February 2013 be recorded as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising

None.

4. Managing the Public Realm

Michael Read (Assistant Director – Environment and Protection, Environment and Neighbourhood Services) gave a presentation on managing the public realm project and informed the committee that he was a member of its' Project Board. Members heard that the new public realm contract would include waste and recycling, street cleaning, grounds maintenance in parks and Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) sites and burial services. The vision of the project was to improve the look and feel of the borough, especially as the services provided were the most visible to residents. It was imperative to generate less waste and to improve sustainability and a holistic approach would be taken. Current spending on these services was around £16.4m a year and the savings target for the project was £1.35m a year, a saving of around 10%. A further issue was posed by the rapidly increasing population that would present challenges in keeping down total waste and it was noted that there had been a 10% growth in households, 82% increase in private renting and 11% increase social renting. In addition, a large percentage of the population did not speak English as their first language, whilst in some wards, around 10% of the population had been in living the UK for two years or less. Michael Read emphasised that it was importance that residents had a sense of belonging as they were more likely to participate in recycling and reducing waste and the waste contractors would be encouraged to work with local residents.

Michael Read stated that other issues to consider included the impact on the population of welfare reforms and the high expectations on the standard of parks. As there was currently no waste depot in operation in the borough, the costs of sending waste to another depot outside Brent were higher. However, the recent acquisition of a depot in Alperton was likely to help bring costs down. Initial discussions to share a public realm contract with the London boroughs (LB) of Barnet, Hounslow and Richmond had led to the possibility of a joint contract between LBs Barnet and Brent. However, LB Barnet was ultimately unable to continue towards a collaboration, meaning LB Brent would be pursuing its own contract. The tendering process would be through competitive dialogue, following which five tenderers had been invited to outline their solutions to the tender brief by 8 March 2013. Following an evaluation of the proposals, some tenderers would then be invited back to provide more detailed solutions by 13 May 2013. Two tenderers would then be selected to submit their final proposals in August 2013 with the contract awarded in October 2013 to commence from April 2014. Members heard that 60% of the evaluation criteria would be weighted for quality issues and 40% for cost and commercial factors. Consideration would be given to structuring recycling incentives into the contract, such as providing smaller residual bins.

Councillor J Moher (Lead Member for Highways and Transportation) added that consultation would take place with councillors over priorities and options for the public realm contract and a key element would include cleaner streets. The acquisition of the waste depot was important for the borough. With regard to the tendering process, competitive dialogue provided a good opportunity to engage with potential contractors as to what they could do. Councillor J Moher added that LB Barnet had quite a different approach as to what they envisaged for the public realm contract, which was why the two boroughs had gone their separate ways.

During discussion by committee, the importance of communicating with residents concerning waste and recycling was stressed, particularly those where English was not their first language. It was commented that bins were often overflowing, whilst dumping of bulky waste was also occurring and it was asked when the bulky waste fee applied. One member welcomed consideration of an option for the council to set up a tender for commercial waste services and sought further information on whether the costs of the new waste depot were being absorbed. It was enquired whether the recycling of materials would be done by the council itself as opposed to the contractor and what was the possibility of the council building its own recycling plant. Another member commented that there were reports of residents being charged to use the Twyford waste site. In noting the increase in the number of families in privately rented accommodation, it was queried whether an increase in dumping could be attributed to there being no 'too large for the bin' service being available at tenanted properties and what was being done to address this.

Another issue raised by members concerned the rise in beds in sheds that would impact upon the amount of waste generated and on recycling and it was suggested that this could be addressed through the appropriate licensing. In noting that five tenderers would be selected at the outline stage to submit their proposals for the public realm contract, it was enquired whether it was feasible to select different contractors for various services under the public realm depending on areas where they had scored highest in the bidding process. Details were also sought regarding how much savings would be made by bringing together services under the public realm contract and the reduction in savings as a result of the collaboration with LB

Barnet not going ahead. Information was also asked in respect of staff implications and possible redundancies.

In reply to the issues raised by members, Michael Read advised that there was no charge for bulky waste collection unless it involved construction materials. Approaches were also being made to landlords and houses in multiple occupation concerning how waste was dealt with and of the need to recycle. Presently, businesses were responsible for making their own commercial waste collection arrangements, however commercial waste would be offered as an option in the contract tender. Michael Read stated that residents expected clean streets and consideration needed to be given as to whether to adopt a frequency based or standards based cleaning regime. Consideration may also be given as to whether the community could assist in maintaining cleanliness. Keeping green spaces clean was also of considerable importance. In respect of burials, Michael Read acknowledged that this was an area that needed to be treated sensitively and members noted that the council also ran this service on behalf of LB Harrow.

Michael Read advised that the business case for using the Alperton depot had factored in £270k savings a year and acquisition of the depot was self-financing. Presently, the waste contractor undertook responsibility for selling recyclable material and members were advised that recycling plants dealt with recycling in large scale. In view of this, it was more appropriate that recycling be undertaken by the West London Waste Authority (WLWA). With regard to the Twyford waste site, Michael Read advised that this was operated by WLWA and its commercial waste charges helped bridge the financial gap and prevent non WLWA residents from dumping there. With regard to tenanted properties not having access to the 'too large for a bin service', he stated that this matter would be looked into. Members heard that by bringing various services together under a single public realm contract, around £500k savings would be made, although this would have been greater if the collaboration with LB Barnet had proceeded. However, the public realm contract would lead to improved quality of services, cleanliness and the community would benefit from a joined-up approach. With regard to staff implications, Michael Read informed the committee that around 70 council staff were affected by the proposals and it was likely that Parks and Services staff would be subject to TUPE arrangements. In respect of monitoring staff arrangements, these were yet to be finalised.

Councillor J Moher added that consideration may be need to be given to publicising the fact that commercial waste was subject to charges, such as notification in the Brent Magazine.

5. Re-procurement of the new parking contract

David Thrale (Head of Safer Streets, Environment and Neighbourhood Services) gave a presentation on the new parking contract and advised that the current contract was due to expire on 3 July 2013. The new contract would commence from 4 July 2013 and be part of a collaborative procurement competition involving LBs Brent, Ealing and Hounslow. The Brent vision for Parking Services involved:-

- A modern approach to delivering parking services
- Responding to customer demand
- Realising efficiency savings

- Embracing the Brent brand
- Working with neighbouring LBs and engaging with customers to provide high quality services to West London residents

Members were provided details of the procurement process and its' outcome and it was envisaged that the estimated value of the contract would be £37.7m for Brent over ten years, with a first year costing of £4.4m and subsequent years £3.7m a year over a potential ten year term. Savings were anticipated to equate to around 23% in terms of cost of contract, which far exceeded the 5% target in the business case. SERCO had been awarded the contract which also had 'added value' commitments, including improvements to the customer services processes and enhancements to enforcement methods. An additional benefit for LB Brent was the fact that back office functions would be based in the borough.

In terms of how the service would operate, David Thrale explained that recovery of revenue would undergo a data cleansing exercise and the contractor would even be able to pursue penalty charge notices (PCNs) from foreign vehicles. In addition, the longstanding 0845 penalty telephone number would be replaced with a 020 prefix. The new contract would be preceded by the closure of parking shops. The parking shop in Pyramid House had undergone a 'soft closure' with staff available for a period of time to provide help to residents during the changes to the service. A new online system for parking permits has been introduced and is fully automated to give instant decisions in the majority of cases. Significant changes to charges would be introduced from autumn 2013, with differentiation in charges for permits and cashless parking and a simplification of the permit system. David Thrale advised that coin based payments were costly to collect and bank, so over a period of time parking cash machines would be taken out of service through a pilot scheme later this year and depending on how things went, would either be removed or reinstated for a time if residents were not yet ready for the changes.

During members' discussion, details were sought of parking permit costs and whether parking permits could be collected. Clarification was sought concerning Blue Badge holders and whether it was possible to reduce parking permit fees because of the savings made with the new contract. A member asked if an update on how working with the other partner LBs could be provided at a future meeting.

In reply, David Thrale advised that parking permit charges would not change as a result of the retendering of the contract, but would change in accordance with an earlier decision by the Executive in September 2012. It would be possible to pay for parking permits in some local shops, although this would be costlier than from obtaining them online or on the telephone line. A database of Blue Badge holders existed and vehicles would be checked for disability exemption before any penalty charge is issued.

Councillor J Moher added that efforts were being made to tackle instances of Blue Badge fraud. The new contract would be monitored to assess how it was working and in particular the effectiveness of cashless parking.

Michael Read welcomed any feedback from members and to raise any issues that required further explanation or were of any concern to them.

6. **Performance and Finance Review, Quarter 3, 2012-13**

Phil Newby (Director of Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) presented the report and advised that performance overall had improved over the course of the quarter. He informed members that some performance indicators had no specific targets and the way in which performance would be reported in future was being revised and a new format and set of figures would be presented the next time this item was put before the committee. It was noted that overall performance in Adult Social Services continued to improve, whilst school places and foster care remained an issue for Children and Families, along with budget pressures in respect of children's social care.

During members' discussion, concern was expressed about some performance indicators relating to mental health and adult social services remaining red and further explanation was sought as to what the problems were. In addition, details of overspends to the adult social care transformation project were requested. Another member commented on data quality issues with regard to adult social care and that those on direct payments, who were amongst the most vulnerable members of the community, were also being affected by the changes to services. A member sought reasons with regard to the overspend in waste collection and what was being undertaken to address this. He commented that there were instances of waste to being deposited to the side of bins and he asked if any action was being taken in to address this. With regard to the change in recycling target, he also queried whether the previous target was unrealistic. Another member referred to the forecast £50k overspend in the Children and Families budget and in noting that this would be compensated by two other service areas, he sought a breakdown of what these underspends were and asked what action would be taken by this service area to prevent this from happening in the future. Views were sought as to how effective the children's social care transformation project had been and further details were asked with regard to the £2m overspend in Special Educational Needs (SEN).

In reply, Phil Newby advised that a new One Council project was due to commence in respect of mental health services which would suggest taking a fresh approach and look at how the service could be provided in a different and more effective manner. Members heard that most of the problems stemmed from the current provider. Turning to adult social care, Phil Newby stated that data quality issues arose from the way information was reported on Framework 1 and was further complicated by the various ways different Government agencies demanded how they wanted the information presented. With regard to the children's social care transformation project, Phil Newby advised that it had been successful to the extent of prevention of children ending up under direct council care as opposed to fostering and adoption placements. However, the next phase would look at more long term, preventative measures and address root causes. Phil Newby advised that Mick Bowden would be able to provide information in respect of the underspends of the two service areas compensating for the Children and Families overspend and what measures Children and Families were putting place to prevent such overspends in future. A One Council project was tackling issues in relation to SEN and costs were now coming down, including transport costs and capacity building was underway. He advised that further information on the SEN overspend and project could be provided, although this was a more relevant work area for the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Michael Read advised that the waste and recycling overspend was mainly attributable to higher than anticipated tonnages for residual waste to landfill and in addition, the previous recycling target rate had fallen short. Members heard that a 1% shortfall of the recycling rate represented an extra £100k costs to the council and a 1% increase in landfill waste an additional £100k. Other reasons for the shortfall in recycling were due to the fact that the anticipated take up of recycling food waste had not happened and a possible tailing off of enforcement by the contractor. The improving waste management project was looking to focus on addressing these issues with a new work programme with the help of the Waste Enforcement Team, including monitoring of Twyford tip. Michael Read advised that consideration was being given to introducing time banding of waste collections in some streets in town centres as it was felt that this would deter trade waste. Working with landlords and letting agents was also being undertaken in respect of houses in multiple occupation concerning domestic waste, with consideration being given to taking action against landlords where there was a continuing failure to recycle or deposit waste correctly. Michael Read also advised that the Waste Monitoring Team was to accompany the contractor on some waste collection and recycling rounds to monitor how waste was dealt with and then compare the performance on rounds when the contractor was not accompanied.

RESOLVED:-

that the report on Performance and Finance Review, quarter 3, 2012-13, be noted.

7. One Council Overview and Scrutiny work programme

Members discussed the work programme as set out before them. The Chair felt that the committee required further information on Mental Health Services and in particular an explanation as to why performance remained red in this area and what was being done to address this. Councillor McLennan suggested that the committee needed further details concerning Adult Social Services, specifically in relation to details of the strategy on re-assessment of clients and the number of clients moving to direct payments. The committee concurred that these issues needed to be discussed at the earliest opportunity and it was agreed that steps be taken to arrange a special meeting to consider these items before the end of 2012/13.

RESOLVED:-

that a special meeting be arranged before the end of 2012/13 to discuss issues relating to Mental Health Services and Adult Social Services.

8. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the One Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be confirmed at the Annual Council meeting on 15 May 2013.

9. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm

R Colwill

Vice Chair in the Chair