



**MINUTES OF THE PARTNERSHIP AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 20 November 2013 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Van Kalwala (Chair), and Councillors Arnold, Harrison, RS Patel and Krupa Sheth

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Deputations

None.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 October 2013

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2013 be approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

4. Matters arising

Item 3, Matters Arising

Kisi Smith-Charlemagne informed the Committee that she had not received confirmation regarding parking on zigzag lines outside stations and would circulate the information once received.

Item 6, Deputations

The Chair informed the Committee that a letter had been drafted regarding the policy on assets of community value and the final copy would be sent to the Committee once sent to the Lead Member for Environment and Neighbourhoods.

5. Employment & Enterprise Service Update - November 2013

Shomsia Ali, Head of Employment and Enterprise, informed the Committee that the team was now fully staffed. The section was a new service area within the housing & employment division, reflecting the strong links between unemployment and housing needs. The Head of Employment and Enterprise informed the Committee that a borough employment strategy was in the process of being drafted. To inform this, consultation on the evidence base had taken place, including with key stakeholders such as the Department for Working Pensions (DWP) and the College of North West London (CNWL). The Employment Strategy will be aligned to the Housing Strategy for the next five years.

The Head of Employment and Enterprise gave a presentation demonstrating the employment trends in the borough and the challenges facing the team and the borough as a whole. She drew members' attention to key trends in the borough, including a population increase over the last ten years, particularly an increase in the working age population. Shomsia Ali explained that the London average for the proportion of working age adults in employment was 69.5%, only 1.4% higher than Brent. 10.6% of persons of working age were unemployed and looking for work (a total of 14,100 unemployed people in Brent). This pattern of Brent recording an unemployment rate 2 -3% above London and the UK rate had been consistent over the past 15 years. Shomsia Ali drew attention to differences within ethnic groups, with a low percentage of Black/African/Caribbean/British residents being economically active.

The Head of Employment and Enterprise highlighted the difference between unemployment and 'worklessness', sighting that unemployment (Jobseekers Allowance claimant count) had been decreasing and coming in line with the London average despite the population increase. Shomsia Ali informed the Committee that the residents of Brent had fared well in comparison to previous recessions, suggesting the population was resilient and self sufficient. She continued to explain that approximately 50% of unemployed persons on job seekers allowance (JSA) were able to get a job within six months, with only 25% remaining in long term unemployment. Shomsia Ali drew attention to differences within claimant groups, including that 18 – 24 year olds are no more likely to be claiming JSA for more than a year than any other age group. The rate of long term unemployment for 18 – 24 year olds was marginally below the average rate for the UK (Brent 1%, UK 1.2%). Those JSA claimants aged over 50 years were marginally more likely to still be unemployed after 12 months. Members queried the exact number of 18-24 year olds in long term unemployment and it was agreed that this information would be circulated to the Committee by the Head of Employment and Enterprise.

Shomsia Ali informed members that despite an overall positive borough picture, a ward based analysis showed that there was growing polarisation in the borough. The wards that have since 1992 experienced the highest levels of unemployment still continue to have entrenched poverty and unemployment. Shomsia Ali highlighted the strong relationship in areas of deprivation with low employment rates, ethnicity and housing tenure. The highest level of unemployment and economic inactivity was amongst the Black and African Caribbean communities in social housing or private rented homes. It was noted that long term unemployment rates in these wards was improving although there was still a significant variance with other wards.

The Head of Employment and Enterprise informed members of the change in labour demand in the borough including; 14% increase with NVQ4 since 2007, 10% increase with NVQ3 since 2007 and 3% increase with no qualifications. Members queried whether this information could be broken down by ward and it was agreed that this would be looked into. It was noted that the population and qualification increase may be due to skilled workers moving into the borough. It was noted that the job density within the borough was low, at 0.55 and was more comparable with rural areas. It was highlighted this was partly due to an increase in the working age population rather than a decline or exit of a particular industry within the borough. Shomsia Ali highlighted that there were six JSA claimants pursuing each vacancy

compared to the national average of four persons per vacancy. Shomsia Ali informed members of the drop in manufacturing jobs, with the public sector remaining a critical employer with a low number of business and finance jobs in the borough. It was clarified that the borough had a good child care and hospitality industry although it was recognised that these often had a lower skill entry. The Head of Employment and Enterprise informed members of the increased median earnings per week although this still remained below the London average. A significant increase in median wages suggested that this was a result of higher skilled people, with higher income jobs moving into the borough. It was noted that the employment strategy would have to make choices regarding its focus such as reducing unemployment (claimant count), improving wages or working more broadly with those impacted by worklessness (regardless of benefit type) including with those most affected by the benefit cap. It was recognised that work would need to be undertaken with partners as well as linking with regeneration strategies and the housing strategy.

In response to queries regarding persons failing to seek suitable work opportunities, it was explained that many persons did not choose unemployment and was due to numerous factors including incapability and care responsibilities. It was confirmed that those failing to engage in employment activities were the responsibility of DWP where tighter sanctioning regimes were in place. Following queries regarding the employment responsibilities of persons housed out of the borough (as a result of the implementation of the overall benefit cap), it was explained that this had happened historically due to lack of affordable housing in the borough and following the benefit cap, housing had been sought in the midlands as well as London boroughs such as Slough. It was explained that a local support worker had been employed in the Midlands to support the families and was assisting in finding suitable schools as well as employment and training opportunities. It was clarified that Brent were responsible for the families for the first two years however if permanent housing was found then the responsibility was only for the first 12 months. It was noted that it was not suitable to place residents out of the borough and where children were in an exam year, every effort was made to ensure they remained in the borough for schooling purposes.

During discussions it was noted that the Employment and Enterprise team may need to be restructured as the Navigator pilot was due to finish at the end of December 2013 with the team being shaped by the outcomes of the Employment Strategy once developed. It was explained that the team had evolved with the welfare changes, with increased partnership working and partners such as DWP and Citizens Advice Bureau now based at the Civic Centre, ensuring effective solutions could be sought quickly. It was clarified that the Navigator service was initially intended as a signposting service however this evolved over time to provide more intensive one-to-one support, particularly around job brokerage due to an absence of job brokerage service in the borough. An internal review of the service had taken place with an external review scheduled to conclude for end of February 2014. This will inform the future of the service, along with the employment strategy.

Jon Lloyd Owen, Operations Director, Housing & Employment drew member's attention to the work undertaken to secure employment opportunities for the London Designer Outlet. The Employment and Enterprise team had led a borough-wide partnership to secure job opportunities for local residents. The recruitment for the London Designer Outlet is ongoing. At present, the team has had access to

crics, 500 vacancies, with nearly 50% of these being secured by people supported by Wembley Works. Following the restructure of the Wembley Works team it was confirmed that there were now three persons in post acting as a single point of contact for a large proportion of the Outlets vacancies and compiling a database of 2500 residents seeking job opportunities.

In response to queries it was confirmed that a group of senior colleagues from partner organisations, including DWP and Work Programme providers had been established with a partnership agreement being signed and the Council taking a strategic lead.

Following queries regarding how the borough would be shaped following completion of the strategy, it was explained that this would depend on the focus the strategy took. It was noted that it was key to recognise partner's limitations and the effect the current climate had on any initiatives as well as the limited resources available to the Council. The Operations Director, Housing & Employment informed members of the need to grow business in the borough, particularly as small businesses looked to expand and the lack of suitable premises available. Members reflected upon the changes in Wembley and the opportunities available such as the stadium and park royal and noted that individual areas needed to be improved to ensure correlation with the economic growth of the borough and to secure jobs for local residents. Jon Lloyd Owen informed members that the Navigator pilot had highlighted gaps that needed to be explored but also that the work undertaken with individuals although not always resulting in employment, had broken down many barriers preventing them entering the workforce. Following discussions it was recognised that further work was required regarding employment education at school as well as engaging private sector companies.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the report.

6. **Brent Council's New Apprenticeship Programme**

Shomsia Ali informed the Committee that there were various roles available within the in-house council apprenticeship scheme. Shomsia Ali confirmed that vacancies were being advertised nationally via the National Apprenticeship Service website, but also locally through her team. Work was being undertaken with partners to identify young persons suitable for the roles and make them aware of the opportunities. It was explained that the first trench of apprenticeships would commence in January 2014 and it was felt that an update should be provided in March 2014.

RESOLVED:

- (i) Members noted the report,
- (ii) That an update be provided in March 2014.

7. **Work Programme 2013/14**

RESOLVED:

Members noted the work programme.

8. **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Partnership and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been scheduled to take place on 21 January 2014.

9. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm

Z VAN KALWALA
Chair