



MINUTES OF THE PARTNERSHIP AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 21 January 2014 at 7.00 pm

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

Also present: Councillor Hirani

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Cheese

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Deputations

None.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting held on

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2013 be approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

4. Matters arising

Members sought clarification regarding whether the borough employment strategy had been finalised. Members also stated that they were still waiting for a breakdown of labour demand and skills in the borough, by ward. Jacqueline Casson informed members that she would ensure that the information was disseminated to them.

Members also queried what was currently happening to the Employment and Enterprise Team, as the Navigator Pilot had concluded in December 2013 and an external review of the service was due to take place at the end of February 2014. The Chair surmised that the team were probably conducting a review of the pilot at this time.

5. Children's Social Care

Neil MacDonald, Head of Children's Commissioning, introduced the presentation and informed members that Graham Genoni, Operational Director Social Care, sent his apologies. Members were presented with an overview of Child social care. It was explained that Children's services were governed by the Children Act 1989 and subsequent legislation in the Children Act 2004.

One of the main concerns for Children Social Care at the moment, due to its high public profile, was child exploitation and missing children. This had been brought to the public's attention through a number of cases relating to children in residential care homes. It was explained that residential care homes were graded in the same way schools were by Ofsted, and Brent only used homes that had been graded as good or outstanding. Members were informed that Brent currently had 24 children in residential care. It was more expensive for the Council to have a child in residential care than it was to place them in a specialist fostering placement. Therefore the service was trying to work with children at a younger age so that they could avoid needing to place them in residential care. They were also working with families through the family intervention and support team to try and prevent family breakdowns. He explained that there were also having to undertake an increasing number of homelessness applications and that they were working closely with housing on these applications.

Neil MacDonald informed members that the Munro Review contained a number of recommendations for Children's social services. The main focus of the review was to ensure that the child's journey was placed back at the heart of social work. He outlined the different categories of children that the department had a statutory responsibility towards, including children with disabilities, care leavers and Children in Need. Members were informed that per 10,000 Brent's figure was 48.5 which was lower than both Brent's comparative neighbour, Newham, and the national average which was 59. In terms of the structure of Children's Social Services in Brent, it was explained that there were 5 locality teams in the Borough, 4 looked after teams as well the Fostering and adoption teams and Contracts and Commissioning. The Contracts and Commissioning team accounted for £18m of the services £32m budget.

Neil MacDonald explained that in the last Ofsted expectation Brent were deemed to 'need improvement' which was the same as 60% of all Local Authorities. He added that it was believed that the next Ofsted inspection would be tougher. It was explained that the Local Safeguarding Children's Board would also be inspected. Therefore it was very important that the service continued to improve. This included up skilling current social workers and reducing the length of time that an assessment takes before an outcome was determined for the child.

Members sought further clarification as to how the Children's social services and the housing department worked closely together. They also queried why there was not much comparative information in the presentation; for example what was the caseload per social worker in Brent and the number of permanent social workers and how did these figures compare with other boroughs. Members also questioned what work the department were planning to do to ensure that they were improving and received a better grading from Ofsted. They also questioned what the threshold was for a child being removed from their family as there was still, sometimes, a negative perception of Social Services. The Committee concluded their questions by asking how the department supported children leaving care at 18 and how there were taking on the recommendations of the Munro report and putting the child at the heart of social work.

In response to the questions raised by the Committee, Neil MacDonald, explained that some families that were offered housing outside of the borough by the housing department attempted to gain a different offer of accommodation from social

services due to having children in the borough. However social services worked with housing to ensure that they both come to the same offer of housing based on the families' legal rights. Neil MacDonald stated that around 60% of the staff in children's social service were permanent members of staff which was more than neighbouring borough Ealing. He added that he was aware that having a permanent workforce was vital to improving the service which would in turn improve their Ofsted rating. He added that there was a determination in the service to drive through improvements.

In regards to families being fearful of disciplining their children, Neil MacDonald stated that he understood this was a perception of social services. However the reality was that there were fewer children in care and that the main aim of social services was to keep the child within their families.

The Committee were informed that under the Leaving Care Act 2000 the authority had a legal responsibility to provide support for young people leaving care. There was also an initiative called 'staying put' to help children stay in foster care placements after the age of 18. In regards to ensuring that the child's views were taken into consideration, it was explained, that all cases were audited to make sure this was happening. They also sought the views of other young people and children via different groups and forums.

Members thanked Neil MacDonald and noted the presentation.

6. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

Grace Fagan, Principal Officer for Brent Family Front Door (BFFD), began by introducing Nicky Case from Family Solutions and Jacinth Jeffers from Health Economy as well as colleagues from the Metropolitan Police and advised the Committee that they may also ask questions of these officers as well as herself in regards to MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub).

Members were informed that MASH went live in July 2013 and it provided an aligned service so that families could access the support services they needed promptly and efficiently. MASH allowed the different agencies involved to be better at matching services with the needs of the community. Grace Fagan detailed the five core elements of MASH, explaining that these elements were not specific to Brent and had been agreed by all London Stakeholders. All partners involved with MASH were located on the same floor in the Civic Centre, although not all of them were there 5 days a week, they could be reached immediately which helped with information sharing between the different partners. This was detailed as one of the benefits of MASH as joined up working meant they could intervene earlier and ensure that people were quickly signposted to a wide range of services within the community.

Members were advised that Brent had been part of research carried out by Greenwich along with five other boroughs. Greenwich had compared pre and post MASH data from all of the boroughs. In Brent, within a couple of months of MASH being introduced the number referrals had fallen by six. It was explained that once MASH had collated all the relevant intelligence from the different agencies regarding an individual or a family, they were only allowed to hold that information

for six months. Grace Fagan concluded stating that MASH had been set up as a new service with One Council funding for one year and therefore the service would be reviewed in June 2014.

Members enquired why MASH was only able to keep the information for six months. They also enquired how many gangs MASH had identified as being operational in Brent and what action MASH could take against the gangs that had been identified. Members welcomed agencies within in Brent working together and asked if they also worked with other boroughs. They concluded their questions by asking how the financial benefits of the service would be calculated.

Grace Fagan responded by informing members that although they were only able to hold on to the collated information in regards to a referral for 6 months, the individual agencies still had the intelligence they held themselves. Therefore the intelligence gathered on a family or individual was not lost after 6 months. Also Brent did work with other MASHs in other boroughs when needed. In regards to the number of gangs operational in Brent, it was stated that MASH had identified 33 gangs. It was explained that this may be a higher number than the committee were aware of as MASH processed all gang activity even small gangs that only contained a few people. Grace Fagan added that MASH was limited by what they could do by law in regards to gangs. However they were able to identify people who were at risk and work with other agencies to safeguard them.

In conclusion Nicky Case from Family solutions stated that they had a cross benefit calculator that they used to help determine how much intervention cost per person or family and then how much each family was costing them post intervention. Grace Fagan stated that they were hoping that the long term benefits of the service outweighed the financial costs.

Members noted the presentation and thanked Grace Fagan and the other attendees for their time.

7. Housing and Safeguarding

Laurence Coaker, Head of Housing Needs, began by stating that although his team did not sit with the MASH team, they did have a single point of contact within their team that MASH could contact. Members were then informed that the cap on benefits had not yet had as big of an impact on the service as predicted. However rent arrears were now starting to accrue in the Borough. He stated that there were a number of families that Brent had assumed a duty too that were in temporary accommodation that would have to be relocated outside of the Borough. He stated that before they made a decision to move a family with children they did contact Children's Social Services to ensure that there were no safeguarding issues. They had also set up a system to track children to make sure that they appeared back on the radar in the area that they had been moved too. He added that Chris Spencer had interviewed him to identify the gaps in safeguarding in housing. It was identified that more training was needed for front line staff to recognise abuse and what to do with that information.

Members questioned how many families had been moved outside of the borough and they also queried how the 'Safe and Secure' initiative was working in Brent.

Laurence Coaker explained to members that the families that were in temporary accommodation were the families that Brent had accepted that it had homeless duty too. Since October 2012, 7 of these families had chosen to leave the borough voluntarily. Since the change in legislation in September 2012 the authority could discharge its duty to house to the private sector. He stated that they received around 100 applications a week for housing and they accepted a duty to around 900 a year. He added that they were hoping that they would be able to discharge at least 50% of those applications to the private sector. Currently they were discharging 26 a month to the private sector.

In regards to Safe and Secure, Laurence Coaker explained that its success was inconsistent in Brent. This was primarily due to most of the London Boroughs not having suitable 2 or more bedroom properties for people to move into. He stated that they received no more 12 applications a year as it was initiative that was designed to only support a small number of people.

Members thanked Laurence Coaker and noted the presentation.

8. Adult Safeguarding

Phil Porter introduced the presentation explaining that safeguarding adults did not have the same legislative framework as children social services did. The assumption was that those over the age of 18 were able to make decisions for themselves. Therefore the Council worked to safeguard all vulnerable adults against significant harm or exploitation.

Members were then informed that although safeguarding adults was everyone's responsibility, Brent Safeguarding Adults Board and the Adult Safeguarding operational team had specific responsibility for safeguarding adults. The operational team were focussed on outcomes and like Children's Social Services they tried to ensure that the person was at the centre of the process and the team's first priority was to ensure that the person was safe. The team consisted of a range of professionals including social workers, a previous police officer and a nurse. Adult Safeguarding did not have a legislative framework but was framed by 'No Secrets' guidance and Pan London Safeguarding Procedures.

Phil Porter detailed the different types of Safeguarding Adults investigations including Office of the Public Guardian Matters which took place when a vulnerable adult, whose money was managed by a friend or relative through a Power of Attorney, was financially abused. In regards to investigations against an individual person who were not employed to provide services, the Safeguarding Adults Operational Team were able to investigate and determine their outcome on a balance of probabilities which was a less stringent burden of proof than the police needed to investigate.

In regards to the investigations that Safeguarding Adults Operation Team carried out they did take, on average, longer to complete than the 25 days target. However Brent was getting better at ensuring that all investigations had a conclusive outcome rather than being deemed 'Not Determined /Inconclusive'. Alerts to the team had almost doubled since 2010 yet the number of referrals had stayed the

same. This was encouraging as it meant that more people were aware of vulnerable adults and were reporting instances.

Phil Porter concluded his presentation by informing members that Adult Safeguarding had two priorities for 2014. The first was to reduce financial abuse, as a significant proportion of it could be avoided. The second was to reduce the number of pressure ulcer incidents as again, in a number of instances, they were avoidable.

Members discussed the presentation and raised a number of queries. They questioned what the budget was for delivering the Adult Social Services safeguarding adults priorities and how they would quantify the savings they made by achieving these priorities. Members also sought clarification as to who regulated private care homes and ensured they were safeguarding their residents. Details were also requested as to why vulnerable adults did not feel safe in the Borough. The Committee asked what the main issues were facing Adult Social Services and concluded their questioning by asking how officers got the message out to the diverse community in Brent.

Responding to the queries raised, Phil Porter informed members that it would be hard to quantify the financial benefits. However the work would be deemed as core business and therefore they would not have to make savings to deliver the work. In regards to how private care homes were licensed, Councillor Hirani explained that CQC checked all homes and accredited them. It was added that the council did not assess the quality of individual care homes themselves as this would result in a duplication of work. However they did carry out contract monitoring visits, social and feed information to the CQC. Therefore were checks and balances in place. Phil Porter clarified that the Council had a responsibility to all vulnerable adults whether their care was self-funded or publicly funded.

Phil Porter stated that it was a trend within the borough that people who received care did not feel as safe as people who received care in other boroughs. Therefore a wider council approach was needed to tackle this to ensure that people did feel safe. In regards to the risks that the work programme faced, Phil Porter stated that the main risk was under reporting of incidents. To ensure that this message was delivered to the diverse community Phil Porter was visiting the multi faith forum and added that more could be done to get the message out.

Councillor Hirani concluded by stating that they wanted to continue to raise the profile of abuse to vulnerable adults. They also wanted to change the culture so that people did not hide concern and instead there was an environment of openness.

The Committee thanked Phil Porter and Councillor Hirani and noted the presentation.

9. Police - Adult Safeguarding

The Committee noted that these issues had been discussed in previous items.

10. Fire Services - Adult Safeguarding

Terry Harrington, Borough Commander Brent, London Fire Brigade gave a presentation on how the fire brigade in Brent were currently safeguarding adults in the borough. Members were informed that the key performance indicators (KPIs) on the monthly statistical bulletin were colour coded green, amber and red depending on how well the fire brigade were achieving each indicator. Terry Harrington highlighted to members that there were four indicators that were red.

Members were informed that based on the number of dwelling fires that had already occurred, the brigade were on target to meet their end of year targets for dwelling fires. It was explained that a number of the fires had occurred in multiple occupancy, rented properties due to a number of reasons including substandard conditions and overuse of the property. In light of this, the Fire Brigade, were in support of Brent Council's potential initiative to ensure that all private landlords were licensed.

It was explained that the reason they had not met their KPI for outdoor rubbish fires was due to an on-going issue regarding the amount of rubbish on the streets in Brent. It was hoped that having a more effective reporting mechanism between the fire brigade and the council would help ensure that rubbish was being dealt with promptly. Once this mechanism was put in place, Terry Harrington hoped to roll out a volunteer cycle scheme which had proved successful in other boroughs. They had also not met their KPI for outbreaks of fires in residential homes and sheltered housing. It was explained that this was primarily due to people who had been assessed to be able to live independently having some difficulties with certain tasks. Terry Harrington stated that he believed that because of this it would be a good idea for the fire brigade to be involved in the case management of these vulnerable adults to ensure that fire safety risk assessments were conducted. Phil Porter, Head of Adult Social Care stated that he would be happy to work with the fire brigade on this. Terry Harrington stated that they had already exceeded their KPI target for all non-domestic fires in PRO properties. He added that this was due to Brent having the largest industrial estate in Europe as well as a high density of industrial units elsewhere. Therefore they were seeking an evaluation of this KPI target in Brent. It was added that a number of these industrial units had been converted illegally to domestic dwellings and that more was needed to deter people from doing this.

In regards to people being stuck in lifts in Brent, it was explained that London Fire Brigade had developed a strategy with Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) to ensure that if people called 999 the control room would divert the calls to Brent lift engineers as opposed to the fire brigade. This was because a lot of the calls that the Fire Brigade were responding too were non-emergency calls. It was concluded that this arrangement was working well but that there were a number of lifts outside of this agreement that still meant the fire brigade were responding to non-emergency calls.

Members questioned whether the fire brigade had been able to prosecute any offending landlords. They also questioned whether the Fire Brigade passed on the information when they discovered an illegal over development of a property. Members also sought clarification as to whether the fire brigade and the Council could protect people being exploited by landlords through adult safeguarding.

In response to the questions raised Terry Harrington explained that when the fire brigade were able to prosecute landlords and that they were currently prosecuting some landlords. However these prosecutions could take years. He added that they did liaise with the planning department at the council but that currently there were strict guidelines for properties that actually needed a license and most private rented properties did not fall within these guidelines. It was explained that there was an information sharing protocol but that the fire brigade were not eligible to view some of the information.

Phil Porter explained that there was a nationally agreed definition of what constituted a vulnerable adult and if an adult fell within this definition then the Safeguarding Adults Team could act. However, it was agreed that there were a number adults who would not fit into these categories but who may be at high risk of being exploited by their landlords. Terry Harrington stated that in Camden they were developing a strategy to protect vulnerable adults who were deemed to be at risk for different reasons. DCI Tariq informed the committee that a similar meeting was taking place at Brent Civic Centre on 26 February and invited the fire brigade to that meeting. Phil Porter highlighted that adult social care also provided support to people where self-neglect was putting their health at risk.

Members noted the presentation and thanked Terry Harrington for his time and commented that they also had similar evidence of over loading of private rented accommodation and welcomed the suggestion to license private landlords.

11. Work Programme 2013/14

Members noted the work programme.

12. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Partnership and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been scheduled to take place on 20 March 2014.

13. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 10.15 pm

Z VAN KALWALA
Chair