



## **LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT**

### **MINUTES OF THE PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SELECT COMMITTEE Wednesday, 28th October, 2009 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Dunn (Chair), Councillor HB Patel (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Butt, Moloney (alternate for Councillor Ahmed) and Van Kalwala

Also Present: Councillor Van Colle (Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture)

Apologies were received from: Councillors Mendoza and Pagnamenta

#### **1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

None declared.

#### **2. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 8th September 2009**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the last meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2009 be agreed as an accurate record.

#### **3. Matters Arising**

None.

#### **4. Brent Housing Partnership's Responsive Repairs Service Void Management and Capital Programme**

Gerry Doherty (Director of Technical Services, Brent Housing Partnership) gave a presentation on this item, stating that as a result of the Lean Fundamentals review of responsive repairs, a new Responsive Repairs system had been introduced in September 2008. Under the previous system, many repairs were delegated to sub contractors, however the number of directly employed operatives had now increased from 11 to 59. The new Responsive Repairs system also meant that operatives would not move onto another job until they had completed the one they had been allocated. The changes had led to a number of performance improvements, with failure demand, where a tenant calls more than once about the same job, reduced from 50% to 20%. Percentage of appointments made and kept was 99%, percentage of jobs completed on first visit 91%, percentage of jobs resulting in complaints at 1.5% and percentage of stage one complaints answered in target 94%. The new responsive repairs system complemented the Council's objective to reduce unnecessary customer contact. Overall satisfaction of tenants

satisfied with the Repairs Service was 97% and this was not just based on telephone surveys but also through other means such as receiving thank you letters.

Turning to management of voids, Gerry Doherty advised that a dedicated Repair and Void Team was set up in 2006 on a 10 year contract following a Void Service review in 2005. The average days taken to re-let a void property had reduced from 31 days in 2006/07 to 28 days between April to September 2009, slightly over target, however this was expected to be attained by the end of 2009/10. Members noted that the average days to repair a void was 23 days during the period April - September 2009.

With regard to the Brent Housing Partnership (BHP) Works Programme, Gerry Doherty stated that a budget of £25 million was available for 2009/2010. This was larger than usual, due to £5.2 million being brought forward from 2010/11 after the Council had successfully applied for earlier access to funds as part of a Government initiative to boost the construction industry during the recession. However, Gerry Doherty warned that the budget for 2010/11 would only be £8.5 million. The Select Committee heard that customer satisfaction with major works had risen from 89% in 2005/06 to 94% in 2008/09. Twenty major works contracts were being undertaken for 2009/10 and would commence in the next month following tendering. The relevant ward councillors would be informed of these works. It was noted that over 4,000 homes needed to be updated to receive digital television before the switchover in 2012, with 1,000 having already been so. Following delays to the South Kilburn Regeneration Scheme, priorities at had been identified for South Kilburn Capital Works. This included concrete testing and repairs, window repair and redecorations, electrical safety testing, lift refurbishments and communal heating repairs. An additional £3 million had been set aside to undertake these and to date concrete testing and repairs had been undertaken for six blocks. Gerry Doherty advised that a capital gap of £10 million per year over 30 years had been estimated and that Tribal were assisting the Council in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) review. HRAs were also being reviewed nationally by the Government and a report was due to be submitted to the Council in June 2010.

Helen Evans (Managing Director, Brent Housing Partnership) added that the Government was consulting nationally on proposals to abolish the current HRA and if Councils were able to agree on how to manage or pass on debts, which were considerable for Brent, then progress could be made. However, she advised there was little prospect of this and that a further review was more likely. Brent, along with a number of other authorities, had a particularly strong housing demand and some capital projects were already being reviewed for possible cancellation. The present economic situation provided a further challenge and increased the risk of some housing falling below the Decent Homes standard.

During discussion, Councillor Moloney reported that he was receiving complaints concerning standards and he enquired if the number of complaints received could be broken down into seasonal figures. He also asked if ten year light bulbs were being installed and whether buildings from the 1950s, 1960s and the 1970s met fire safety standards. He commented that filling voids promptly could sometimes be difficult, such as when an occupier died. With regard to unpaid bills by leaseholders, Councillor Moloney suggested that a charge could be made to the property when it

was sold. Councillor Van Kalwala sought details of the response in the consultation over leaseholder contributions and what was the success rate of recovering payments due from leaseholders.

The Chair enquired what the main issues were with regard to complaints being received. He commented that the new repairs system delegated power across the entire structure including the repair operatives, which helped improve standards of work carried out and increased job satisfaction. With regard to voids, the Chair asked how this compared with other Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). The Chair acknowledged the scale of the financial pressures facing the Major Works Programme.

In response to the issues raised, Gerry Doherty confirmed that approximately 200 complaints had been received to date for 2009/10. Only 40 of these complaints had been made in customer satisfaction surveys out of a total return of approximately 1,600 returned which represented a significant improvement. The previous repairs system presented too many opportunities for failure, however under the new system the fact that repair operatives would not move onto another job before completing the one they were doing was a major factor in reducing complaints. Complaints were not particularly affected by the seasons and usually concerned time or process issues and rarely were due to quality of work. Gerry Doherty advised that he could not be certain that ten year light bulbs were being installed, however 95% of properties now had smoke alarms. Tenants and leaseholders were also being educated with regard to fire safety issues.

Helen Evans added that some clients still wanted fixed appointments for repairs which would try and be accommodated. Members noted that the new repairs system did not require such high monitoring as the previous one and the call centre identified the type of repair requested, whilst the operative would decide what specific work was necessary. In respect of voids, Helen Evans advised that BHP was in the top quarter of performers with only a handful performing better, however she added that other housing associations in Brent had different ways of measuring performance. She advised that leaseholders had consulted over the legislative process concerning leaseholder contributions which could be larger in some places, such as conservation areas. A balancing of the needs of tenants, who tended to want more works to be undertaken, as compared to leaseholders who wanted lower costs, needed to be struck. Approximately 45-50% of leaseholder payments had been received to date and it was expected that this would be close to 100% by the end of 2009/10. Interest free payments over a period of time and 5% off total costs were also offered as incentives, and decisions of leaseholder tribunals rarely ruled against the Council.

The Chair asked that the Select Committee be updated concerning voids, the repair service and the situation concerning the HRA at a future meeting.

## **5. Waste Contract Performance**

Ian Stewart (Waste Service Manager, StreetScene Team, Environment and Culture) introduced the report and confirmed that the overall recycling rate of 32.56% as of end of August 2009 represented around a 4% increase from that achieved at the same point last year. This included a 16% increase in the total amount of organic waste for composting, a 7% increase in the amount of waste

recycled and a 7% drop in the amount of waste sent to landfill. The tranche 1 score in street cleansing for 2009/10 had shown a drop in performance, with 23% of streets failing to meet an acceptable standard compared to 13% from the first tranche from the previous year. However, Ian Stewart advised that this year's tranche 1 was only one week different to the period covered from last year's tranche 2, which had recorded 22%, so seasonal factors could clearly be seen to be of significance. Members also noted performance in respect of missed collections, complaints and results from the Residents' Attitude Survey 2009.

Councillor C J Patel stated that residents had reported that green recycling boxes had not always been put back in the same place by the waste collection crew. The Chair commented that waste that fell from the refuse collection vehicles and was not picked up and he suggested that Veolia be asked to coordinate their services so that road sweeping took place soon after refuse had been collected from a road. He reported that residents had expressed preference for lids to be attached to the green recycling boxes, as some items such as paper could easily be blown out by the wind. He also suggested that it would be useful for Members to shadow a refuse collection crew for a day and view the whole refuse process from beginning to end and asked officers to investigate the possibility of doing this.

In reply, Ian Stewart advised that any waste dropped during collection should be picked up by the refuse collection crew and that he would raise the issue with Veolia. Members heard that the London Borough of Enfield had tried to introduce a system of street cleansing being undertaken soon after refuse had been collected from the street, however considerable practical problems had been encountered. Ian Stewart agreed to report back to the Select Committee with regard to this issue and also on the possibility of attaching lids to green recycling boxes at a future meeting. He was aware of green recycling boxes not being returned to the spot where they were collected from and advised that officers were to undertake spot checks across the whole borough to monitor this, adding that he would be looking for evidence that Veolia staff were being trained correctly with regard to this. Ian Stewart also agreed to investigate the possibility of Members shadowing the refuse collection process.

## **6. Waste Strategy Development**

David Pietropaoli (Waste Policy Manager, Waste Management and Recycling Team, Environment and Culture) provided an update on the development of a revised Waste Strategy, a key Council priority and a Gold project as part of the One Council Improvement and Efficiency Action Plan 2010-2014. The revision would set out how the Council would meet the requirements of the new Waste Strategy for England and a business plan and case was in the process of being developed. Members heard that the strategy would also provide a framework of decisions on the management of municipal solid waste in Brent over the next 10 years and how it would conform to the zero waste vision set out by the West London Waste Authority (WLWA). David Pietropaoli then referred to the timetable for producing the strategy and Members noted that the process of preparing the strategy was complete, whilst self-assessment would be undertaken in November and December 2009. Clarification of the Council's present situation would be undertaken during this time and the Select Committee noted that the Council would use London's waste composition analysis in the absence of a Brent one. David Pietropaoli stated that a workshop involving WLWA and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural

Affairs would help identify future aims during January-February 2010, followed by consideration of how these aims would be achieved in March – May 2010. This would be followed by the revision of the headline strategy in May – June 2010, which would involve consultation with councillors and the public with a view to launching the revised strategy in September 2010. Members also heard that a workshop involving the Greater London Assembly was planned in December 2009 and that the WLWA was looking at new technologies in dealing with waste. David Pietropaoli confirmed that the strategy encompassed waste collection and street cleansing.

Councillor Van Colle (Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture) advised that this was a waste collection and street cleansing strategy and not a waste disposal strategy. He also advised that the WLWA's vision was zero waste to landfill and not zero waste per se. Members heard that a recycling and compost rate of 70% was the theoretical maximum achievable, whilst the issue of Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS) also needed to be resolved. The strategy needed to be considered in the context of the Mayor of London's Waste Strategy which sought to address carbon emissions issues and the lack of available energy. Energy generation was another important consideration and there were presently no proposals in respect of this for the Wembley Regeneration area. Councillor Van Colle stated that it had been identified that there was a lack of bring sites in Brent and in West London in general and this needed to be addressed. Emerging technology in the way waste was collected also needed to be considered, such as autoclaving which baked waste and allowed collection of products that had not melted, such as plastics, to be extracted for recycling.

During discussion, the Chair commented that there was no mention of how commercial waste would be addressed and the issues such as reduction in packaging by retailers. He felt that a 70% recycling target lacked ambition and suggested that a more positive approach was required, stating that far higher recycling rates had been achieved in other cities such as Vienna whose recycling rate was approximately 98%. He queried the continued use of the incinerator plant at Brent Cross and whether it was intended to send most of the non-recycled waste to landfill or to an incinerator. The Chair continued that incinerators used a lot of energy and also produced toxic waste, with the resulting ash being sent to landfill. It was suggested that Friends of the Earth, Green Zones and Street Watch be invited to participate in any workshops held by the Council in developing the revised strategy. The Chair also spoke of the need to get the Brent community more involved generally with regard to the strategy. He also sought further details with regard to the involvement of councillors, savings targets and waste composition analysis.

In reply, Councillor Van Colle advised that the Mayor of London's Waste Strategy addressed issues concerning commercial waste. Members heard that the Council had a contract still in force with the incinerator plant operators at Brent Cross and that it dealt with a proportion of non recyclable waste. Councillor Van Colle added that the heat produced by the incinerators could be used to generate energy in future.

David Pietropaoli added that policies to reduce waste and increase reuse would be identified and suitable actions put in place to achieve these. With regard to the workshops, he advised that these focused on technical issues at this stage and that

it might be appropriate to include the organisations mentioned by the Chair in any workshops that were arranged at a later stage. However, Friends of the Earth and residents associations were to be consulted over the strategy. Members heard that WLWA had agreed to undertake waste composition analysis on behalf of all London authorities and that it would be affected by seasonal variations. It was noted that the Council did not have sufficient resources to undertake its own waste composition analysis. David Pietropaoli advised Members that savings of £1.2 million were required from waste collection and street cleansing activities as part of the Council' Improvement and Efficiency Action Plan and that a business case was being prepared to specify where these savings would be made. Clear lines of reporting and consulting with councillors would be in place in developing the strategy.

The Chair emphasised the importance of educating residents of the need to recycle and of the cost implications to them with regard to LATS charges for landfill waste. He also suggested that signage on bins be clear as to what can and cannot be put in it.

## **7. Performance and Finance Review Quarter 1, 2009/10**

Phil Newby (Director of Policy and Regeneration) introduced the performance aspect of the report in quarter one of 2009/10. Members heard that overall there had been a decline in performance which was of some concern, with 30% of indicators classified as well below target, as opposed to 26% from the previous quarter. Areas of concern included:-

- Rise in crime, including gun crime
- Fly tipping
- Number of visitors to libraries
- Adults receiving secondary mental health services in employment
- Brent carers
- School places
- Complaints

Phil Newby advised that the perpetrator of a series of hold-ups of betting shops in Brent had been arrested and that gun crime had since dropped, whilst the adults receiving secondary mental health services in employment had been affected by the recession. Members noted that although Brent was second best performer of all London boroughs in terms of complaints dealt with by the Ombudsmen, there continued to be concerns about complaints being escalated from stage one to stage two and from stage two to stage three.

Mick Bowden (Deputy Director of Finance and Corporate Resources) then updated the Select Committee on the financial situation for quarter one of 2009/10. He advised that a net overspend of the General Fund Revenue budget of £4.5 million by the end of the first quarter was forecast, with the two main areas of overspend being Children and Families at £2.8 million and Environment and Culture at £1.6 million. Environment and Culture had been particularly affected by a drop in revenues from parking charges.

During discussion, Councillor H B Patel asked if the rise in the escalation of complaints was due to a lack of training of new staff. Councillor Van Kalwala enquired whether complaints received were particularly common from certain sections of the community or certain areas. He also asked if any measures were being taken with regard to educating residents over changes to Council services. Councillor Van Kalwala also asked if pressures on school places would continue to be an issue. Councillor Butt enquired whether any overspends for 2009/10 would affect the Council's standing balance and sought further views with regard to falling revenues. He also asked what measures would be in place to accommodate areas where growing demand was driving costs up.

In reply, Phil Newby advised that complaints tended to be received by certain service areas and were often as a result of changes to front line staff. He emphasised the importance of providing staff with the sufficient training and confidence to be able to handle complaints and the Complaints Team was providing ongoing training with regard to this. It was being reinforced to service areas of the need to resolve complaints at stage one and consideration was being given to removing stage two in order to motivate service areas to resolve complaints at the first stage.

Mick Bowden advised that the £4.5 million overspend meant that the Council's general fund balance was £3.1 million, some way below the target balance of £7.5 million and every effort was being made to redress this. An improvement in the balances of individual service areas was already underway. Members heard that Environment and Culture were in the process of identifying patterns with regard to falling revenues, although this was a difficult exercise to undertake. However, forecasting for next year had so far indicated that the fall in revenue had bottomed out. With regard to rising demand in some service areas, Mick Bowden cited the transformation programme that was underway at Children and Families and it was expected that the benefits of efficiencies would become apparent in the longer term. Growth in the number of children requiring primary school places was expected to continue and access to additional funding was being sought.

Phil Newby agreed to a request from the Chair that the findings on Foster Care that were being looked at as part of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme be reported back to a future meeting of the Performance and Finance Select Committee.

**8. Performance and Finance Select Committee Work Programme 2009/10**

The Select Committee noted the items due for consideration at the next meeting of the Performance and Finance Select Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009.

**9. Items requested onto the Overview and Scrutiny Agenda (if any)**

None.

**10. Recommendations from the Executive for items to be considered by the Performance and Finance Select Committee (if any)**

None.

11. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Performance and Finance Select Committee was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009 at 7.30 pm.

12. **Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

The meeting closed at 9.40 pm

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Chair