



MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Wednesday 6 January 2016 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Kelcher (Chair), Councillor Colwill (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Daly, Farah, Long and Miller, together with Dr J Levison, Mr Payam Tamiz and Iram Yaqub, and appointed observers, Lesley Gouldbourne, Jean Roberts and Brent Youth Parliament representatives

Also Present: Councillors and Butt, Duffy, Pavey, Perrin and Southwood

Apologies were received from: Councillors Stopp, Co-opted Members Ms Christine Cargill and appointed observers

1. **Declarations of interests**

None declared.

2. **Deputations**

None.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes had been separately circulated.

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 2 December 2015 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. **Matters arising**

None.

5. **Safer Brent Partnership - update on progress**

Report withdrawn to be submitted to next meeting.

6. **Review of charges to recycling and green waste collections**

Councillor Southwood introduced the report as being useful to the review of the service, and she admitted that there had been initial challenges to overcome. She was pleased to report that direct debit arrangements were now being introduced. Chris Whyte (Operational Director, Environmental Services) added that some customer handling issues were initially dealt with poorly during March/April 2015

when an increased number of complaints had been received but this had now settled down as residents understood the rationale behind the changes and more had signed up than had been anticipated. He stated that the new service had engineered waste streams down.

Members asked why biodegradable sacks were not sold to those people not able to have a bin. They asked how those people living in flats who could not have a bin could be provided with a garden waste service? The committee asked that the implications on the existing waste contract of enhancing the garden waste recycling scheme by providing the additional option of purchasing biodegradable bags be explored and reported back to committee.

The use of the Cleaner Brent app was discussed. The benefit of the app was recognised but awareness and use of it was patchy across the borough. It was noted that the Council would be mounting a publicity campaign on its use and it was suggested that an officer be present at public forums such as Brent Connects to assist anybody wanting to download the app. Members asked to be informed on the geographical spread of the alerts received from the app on a ward basis.

Questions were asked on how intelligence gathering regarding flytipping incidents was logged and whether this could be made available on a ward by ward basis. Concern was expressed that the same hotspots for fly tipping existed and it was suggested that this was because of a lack of prosecutions and a lack of liaison between the housing service and waste services. The committee agreed that an item should be included in the work programme on reviewing how landlord licensing had impacted on creating a cleaner environment.

A member raised the issue of the disposal of Christmas trees and it was agreed that for next year consideration should be given to providing an improved service.

Members express concern that, at time of writing the report, Q3 data was not available and requested that this be provided to them.

A request was made for the number of people taking delivery of a composting bin to be divided between wards and made available to members of the committee.

Questions were asked around how it had been established that the amount of green waste had fallen and whether or not it had merely transferred to residual waste. Consideration was given to the contractual arrangements regarding the increased take up of the service, investment in additional resources and the financial benefit to the Council. Concern was expressed that approximately one third of the £120k raised over and above the cap had benefitted Veolia rather than the Council. An explanation was sought on exactly how the money had been divided up, who had authorised it and when this action was taken.

A request was made for average waste per household figures covering the borough and the number of households each refuse vehicle passed per day to be supplied to members.

Requests for information

- the geographical spread of the alerts received from the Cleaner Brent app on a ward basis.
- Provision of Q3 performance data
- the number of people taking delivery of a composting bin divided between wards
- explanation of how the additional revenue generated by the increased take-up of the service had been dealt with
- average waste per household figures covering the borough and the number of households each refuse vehicle passed per day

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the review of the garden waste service changes be noted;
- (ii) that the implications on the existing waste contract of enhancing the garden waste recycling scheme by providing the additional option of purchasing biodegradable bags be explored and reported back to committee;
- (iii) that an item be included on the committee's work programme on reviewing how landlord licensing had impacted on creating a cleaner environment;

7. **Budget scrutiny panel report**

Councillor Kelcher presented the report, stating that for future years he was keen to ensure that scrutiny members played a bigger role in the budget discussions at an earlier stage in the process. He expressed his disappointment that the budget report presented to Council in November 2015 did not mention any input from Scrutiny.

Councillor Pavey responded by addressing the recommendations set out in the report. He stated that he agreed that future budget scrutiny should start earlier. He noted the concern on the proposed saving in road and pavement repairs. He was pleased that income generation had been referenced because this reflected the priority given to it by the Cabinet. Councillor Pavey agreed that new opportunities to raise income needed to be pursued and that more information on this might have been included in the report to Cabinet. He agreed that the time had come to consider increasing the level of Council Tax. He took responsibility for the absence of reference to scrutiny in the budget reports. With reference to the comment that the budget lacked a strategic approach, Councillor Pavey accepted this only to the point that at this stage it was intended to open the issues for consultation.

Members discussed maximising income by carrying out more enforcement but at the same time providing a self financing community benefit rather than simply looking at the fee structure.

The committee was informed that work was being undertaken to look at the those areas where fees and charges already existed but the service could be provided more efficiently, thereby increasing the profit element without increasing the charge.

It was suggested by members of the committee that more could be done to lever in national bodies to carry out pieces of work within the borough.

Reference was made to the Government allocating capital monies to local authorities for dealing with road repairs (potholes). A request was made for details of how Brent's allocation of £300,000 had been put to use. A more general request was made for information on the Council's highways maintenance budget and the approach adopted to different aspects of the programme. Members were interested to see how the programme might join up with other aspects such as how gully cleaning might be prioritised if it was related to preventing local flooding.

A suggestion was made that the use of facilities at the Civic Centre could be made more attractive if better parking provision was made such as by negotiating with surrounding businesses for use of parking space. Reference was made to the development of a Civic Enterprise strategy through which many of the issues raised by the committee could be developed.

Members requested details of the work being carried out on looking at various ring-fenced budgets and other resources being held for specific purposes to be reported to Scrutiny Committee.

The issue of procurement was raised and whether some services could be better procured. Members elaborated their criticism that budget paper did not present a coherent strategic view or address issue such as value for money and productivity. Councillor Pavey responded that he would be happy to further discuss the issues around procurement. He re-iterated that the report was meant to open up the budget debate to public consultation and the issues the Council would face in the longer term.

Requests for information:

- How Brent's allocation of £300,000 for dealing with road repairs (potholes) had been put to use
- the approach adopted to different aspects of the highways maintenance programme and how it relates to other preventative work

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the comments of the Budget Scrutiny Panel regarding budget proposals for the period 2016 and future years be noted;
- (ii) that future budget scrutiny activity be started earlier in the budget setting process from September onwards and engages scrutiny members in the development of proposals;

- (iii) that the future review of income generation activities following work being undertaken by the Chief Executive to develop proposals be considered by the Scrutiny Committee;
- (iv) that it be recommended that a direct debit scheme be put in place for the green bin service;
- (v) that the Cabinet be requested to reconsider the proposed saving in relation to road and pavement repairs and consider alternative ways of maintaining safe roads and pavements;
- (vi) that the Council be recommended to consider raising council tax levels by the maximum 2 per cent allowably by the government with a focus on providing additional resources to protect services for the most vulnerable and as part of this the Council should review the Council Tax support scheme to ensure that the impact is minimised for those in financial hardship;
- (vii) that details of the work being carried out on looking at various ring-fenced budgets and other resources that were being held for specific purposes be reported to Scrutiny Committee.

8. Scrutiny forward plan

The request was made for major education related scrutiny work to be programmed outside of school holidays and teacher conferences.

RESOLVED:

that the committee's forward plan be noted subject to the items raised at meeting being added.

9. Scrutiny key comments, recommendations and actions

NOTED.

10. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 9.50 pm

M KELCHER
Chair