



MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 26 April 2016 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Kelcher (Chair), Councillor Colwill (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Daly, Farah, Long, Miller, Stopp and Tatler, together with co-opted members Ms Christine Cargill, Mr Alloysius Frederick and Dr J Levison

Also Present: Councillors Butt, Choudhary, Ezeajughi, Mashari, Nerva and Perrin

Apologies were received from: co-opted member Iram Yaqub and appointed observers

1. Declarations of interests

None declared.

2. Deputations

None.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting

It was noted that Mr Alloysius was present at the last meeting.

RESOLVED:-

that, subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the previous meeting held on 5 April 2016 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. Matters arising

None.

5. Employment, Skills and Enterprise Strategy 2015-20, One Year On

Members considered an update on the 2015-20 Employment, Skills and Enterprise Strategy. Councillor Mashari (Lead Member for Regeneration and Employment, Growth and Skills) who was present for this item introduced Ray Shilling, Assistant Principal of the College of North West London and Bally Janagal, District Operations Manager for Jobcentre Plus. Councillor Mashari stated that this was the first such strategy for Brent and it was an ambitious document with a focus on employment.

In answer to questions by members of the committee, Councillor Mashari stated that a key aspect of the strategy was the provision of apprenticeships for young people and ensuring local people benefitted. Vacancies for apprenticeship positions were promoted through Brent Works. She agreed with a point made that

more work could be done with the creative industries both in the borough and across West London. It was agreed that targets related to this work would be shared with members of the committee. Matt Dibben, Head of Employment, Skills and Enterprise explained that it was necessary to win the hearts and minds of young people to attract them into positive apprenticeships. It was recognised that for successful apprenticeships it was important that at the end of them good quality jobs were available.

It was agreed to share with committee members the targets for creating apprenticeships, taking account of the view expressed that these should be ambitious and reflect a range of training that would create opportunities for high quality jobs; and to provide a breakdown of current apprenticeships and the type of jobs they aim to get people into.

The need was acknowledged for more work to be done with schools to provide creative careers advice that moved away from focussing on gaining a place at university. In response to a question regarding what was being done for the over 50s out of work it was explained that Brent Start focused on the over 40s and work was being done with the Job Centres to provide more support for the over 50s. With regard to working with ex-offenders it was explained that a multi agency approach was being pursued to provide a pathway to get people back into work but that greater integration between services was needed. It was suggested that a report could be presented in six months' time on this activity.

Acknowledging the many initiatives being pursued, the question was asked what was the overall strategy for pulling all the work together and ensuring it was felt beyond the big regeneration areas in the borough. Councillor Mashari responded that the The Employment, Skills and Enterprise Partnership ensured there were targets and that the strategy continued to be a working document. The view was expressed that some messages needed to be communicated more effectively, especially to young people about the regeneration and growth taking place in the borough and why this could be of benefit to them. It was felt that there needed to be a stronger message to young people about the benefits of apprenticeships and more publicity about the opportunities available.

Reference was made to the Council's outcome based review of work on regeneration and how scrutiny might be involved in the work coming out of this.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted and the committee's comments be acknowledged in taking forward the Employment, Skills and Enterprise Strategy.

6. Impact of the Overall Benefit Cap in Brent

After 2.5 years from implementation of the Overall Benefit Cap, the committee considered the main impact and the potential implications of the proposed reduction in the cap from Autumn 2016.

Councillor Mashari (Lead Member for Regeneration and Growth, Employment and Skills) was present for this item. She introduced the report and drew attention to

the importance of the Welfare Reform Strategy, attached as appendix A to the report, in dealing with the impact of the Cap.

In response to questions about the number of people living in temporary accommodation, the request was made for a breakdown of the numbers of households and children affected as contained in paragraph 7.4 of the report.

Members recognised that housing issues were cross cutting and requested statistics that covered housing related payments across service areas.

Members acknowledged the work being done to mitigate the effect of the Overall Benefit Cap but questioned what the Council was doing to oppose the measure. Councillor Mashari responded that the Council was opposed to the welfare reforms and the Welfare Reform Strategy was the leadership's response. The Council had made creating employment opportunities a key strategic activity. David Oates (Head of Benefits & Customer Services) added that a tool-kit was being prepared and a web site developed in order to provide information and support to those affected. In addition, as part of delivering the Welfare Reform Strategy, a communications plan would be prepared.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the impact of the Overall Benefit Cap and the mitigation activities undertaken since 2013 be noted;
- (ii) that the forecast impacts of the reduction in the cap from Autumn 2016 and the proposed strategy to respond to these noted.

7. Housing pressures in Brent

Members considered the report which provided an overview of the housing pressures in the borough.

The committee was informed that the Lead Member for Housing had given notice that she was unable to attend the meeting. The question was asked what was being done to make available for housing existing buildings in Brent. Jon Lloyd-Owen (Operational Director, Housing and Culture) replied that a number of buildings previously used as offices had been converted for housing but this did not necessarily mean that they were provided at an affordable rent. However, work was undertaken to bring buildings back into use at an affordable rent.

In response to the observation that the report did not cover the impact of mental health and homelessness, Phil Porter (Strategic Director, Community and Wellbeing) acknowledged that the report could have included the work undertaken by the Council and Brent Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in supporting people with mental health needs and that this was part of one of the Council's outcome based reviews.

Addressing the issue of the provision of affordable housing, Jon Lloyd-Owen reported that in 2014/15 40% of housing was provided as affordable which was better than the London average but he acknowledged that provision of this would get harder going forward. The majority of the provision would be supplied by housing associations. The extension of right to buy, the limited amount of land

available and the cap on what the Council could borrow to finance house building all contributed to the challenges ahead.

Councillor Long stated that she had given prior notice of questions she wished to ask on the report and it was agreed that the questions and answers be circulated to all members of the committee.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

8. Promoting Electoral Engagement (IER): Scrutiny update

Councillor Butt introduced the report which updated the committee on implementation of Brent's Individual Electoral Registration (IER) communication and engagement strategy. He explained that all the recommendations of the task group established in response to the challenges posed by the introduction of IER had been implemented.

The committee was informed that it was difficult to draw accurate comparisons with other boroughs but anecdotal evidence suggested Brent had done better than other comparable boroughs to ensure those qualified to be registered were registered.

Councillor Nerva was present for this item in his capacity as chair of the task group. He submitted that some recommendations from the task group had not been fully taken up such as using a QR code, working with colleges to ensure students were registered, fully utilising the role councillors could play, identifying specific hard to reach groups and he asked what action would now be taken to encourage people to register in time for the GLA election.

It was pointed out that a working group chaired by the Chief Operating Officer had been established to push forward the engagement and communications campaign and that this element was also considered by the GLA election project board chaired by the Chief Executive. Given the forthcoming GLA election and EU referendum, Councillor Butt re-assured the committee that the registration activity would not stop. It was suggested that further work could be done in school 6th forms and colleges to promote registration although it was explained that data from schools was already gathered to encourage registration.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the significant work undertaken by the Council as recommended by the task group be noted;
- (ii) that the task group action plan be considered again after the EU referendum has taken place to ensure momentum is maintained in getting people to register, bearing in mind there are no elections planned during 2017;
- (iii) that further work be undertaken on benchmarking outcomes with other similar boroughs to Brent;

- (iv) that a briefing be sought from the Communications Unit on the types of electronic contact with residents used to support promoting electoral engagement;
- (v) that the advice on the use of Council resources during the pre-election period be re-circulated to members;
- (vi) that the significant amount of work undertaken by the Council as recommended by the task group be noted and the recommendations in the report be endorsed.

9. Guillotine

At 10:00pm the committee voted to extend the guillotine by 15 minutes in order to allow completion of the business on the agenda.

10. Data request log

A request was made to chase for the data requested on 9 February 2016 relating to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in Brent.

A local resident, Mr Kaye, referred to the request made by the committee on 2 December 2015 for information on South Kilburn regeneration which was only received on 10 March 2016. He asked what checks were made by the committee on obtaining the information it requested and submitted that the information should be made public. The Chair responded by saying that members did chase up their requests for information and would consider how this was disseminated.

11. 2014-15 Scrutiny Committee meetings - key comments, recommendations and actions

Noted.

12. Scrutiny forward plan

Noted.

13. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 10.15 pm

M KELCHER
Chair