



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 13 October 2009 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Jones (Chair), Castle (Vice-Chair), Clues, Mistry, R Moher and Thomas

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Powney

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor H B Patel

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

None declared.

2. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 9th July 2009**

RESOLVED:-

That the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 9th July 2009 be received and approved as an accurate record.

3. **Matters Arising (if any)**

Cricklewood Library Children's Centre Project and Archive Move

The Chair sought an update concerning the covenant on Cricklewood Library. Members noted that the Council was still undertaking legal investigations regarding the covenant although the appropriate action regarding the location of a children's centre at Cricklewood Library would be taken as soon as the investigations were concluded.

4. **Appointments to Sub-Committees**

None.

5. **Leader's Update on the Council's Priorities**

Councillor Lorber (Leader of the Council) presented his update to the Committee. He began by commenting on the provision of school places in Brent, which according to the Greater London Authority's (GLA) projections for September 2009 suggested that there would be a surplus of 82 places based on 3,360 total reception places. However, the number of applications at reception level exceeded this projection. Newfield and Park Lane schools offered to open an

additional class each to accommodate this, and combined with the planned expansion of 7 places for Anson school and an additional place at Avigdor Hirsh Torah Temimah meant that the number of reception places increased to 3,428 for September 2009. As of 9th October, 4,035 applications had been received, with 108 Brent residents currently without a reception place, however it would not be until the end of October until the true extent of the shortfall would emerge.

Members noted that the pressure on reception places had changed from being primarily in the north and centre of the borough to the south of the borough and the breakdown of shortfalls in other primary school years. It was hoped that investments to expand existing schools would meet the increasing demand for primary school places. Cllr Lorber told the Committee that 3,600 reception places would be needed each year from 2014 due to an increase in the birth rate in Brent. These additional places would have knock on effects as the children moved through the school years. Providing the extra places would cost between £40m and £50m.

Turning to in year secondary school admissions, Councillor Lorber confirmed that the number of children seeking admissions increased in 2009, with the number of new arrivals for the period July – September, the highest since monitoring of this had been recorded from 2006.

Councillor Lorber then provided an update concerning the impact of the recession on the borough. The recession had impacted most on those on lower incomes and there had been an increase in benefit applications and in benefits paid. A number of initiatives had been undertaken to help the community, including the launch of a take up campaign encouraging small businesses to apply for business rate relief, providing targeted employment training and support to job seekers, introducing more apprenticeships and benefit take up initiatives. The regeneration programmes continued to be pursued to ensure that they did not stall under the difficult economic circumstances, whilst there had been a fall in crime overall. Some indicators, such as unemployment data, lagged behind other economic indicators. Councillor Lorber felt that unemployment would continue to rise, even when the national economy moved back into positive growth.

Turning to children's social workers, Members heard that there was a disproportionately large number of temporary agency staff working in the service, however the permanent staff proportion across the whole of Social Care had significantly increased from 56.46% in January 2009 to 71.36% in August 2009. There was a large number of newly qualified staff who required supervision, whilst the number of child referrals had risen. It was noted that the problems experienced in Brent were mirrored by other London boroughs.

Councillor Lorber stressed the importance of exploring opportunities for shared services with partners and other London boroughs and there were already a number of joint projects operating, such as those under the West London Alliance (WLA). The WLA Councils had agreed to collaborate with each other on the procurement and commissioning of Adult Social Care Services and tendering of contracts would commence in autumn 2009 with a contract value of £220 million a year, the largest value exercise of this type in the UK. The WLA had already signed up to a Joint Procurement of Services for Elders and it was estimated that

through joint working, savings of between 1% to 3% could be made, whilst ensuring that the quality of service remained high.

During discussion, Councillor Mistry commented that there had been an increase in the number of overseas unaccompanied children in 2009 and enquired whether there was information breaking down these figures into country of origin and age group. She felt that the recession had impacted more greatly on younger people than those in affordable housing and suggested that the strategy to address the recession could tie in with the Children and Families strategy. Councillor Mistry emphasised the need to ensure that appropriate monitoring and safe guarding measures were in place with regard to newly recruited social workers and enquired whether an external reviewer could be appointed.

Councillor Castle commented that the impact of the recession may not be fully realised until after Christmas 2009, stating that those on lower incomes may experience problems keeping up with rent payments after this time. Councillor Motley, in noting the increase in referrals to social services, stated that this could be partly attributable to the outcome of the Baby P case and he asked whether the number of children in care was monitored on a ward basis. Councillor Clues remarked that Policy and Regeneration were undertaking a mapping of the hotspot areas of the borough that were hit particularly hard by the recession.

Councillor Thomas enquired how school governors were being advised as to their role in child protection. Councillor R Moher welcomed the increase in the number of social workers on a permanent basis, but commented that it took approximately 3 years for a social worker to be fully trained and enquired whether there were enough managers to meet the training need and what was being done to retain social workers. She also felt that locality working was a good idea, however it required skilled social workers with proper support to work effectively.

The Chair enquired whether the main reason for children obtaining places in schools outside the borough was because they were attending a particular faith school and whether the reported increase in the number of Eastern European families returning to their country of origin was reducing the pressure on school places in some instances. She asked whether the number of small businesses taking up rate relief was known and sought further views with regard to regeneration projects, particularly relating to private housing projects. The Chair spoke of the need for good managers to provide training for large number of inexperienced social workers and she hoped that any cuts in expenditure would not mean job losses in this area. Turning to the WLA, she enquired about the timetable for the procurement of Adult Social Care Services and would target setting by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) provide added value. The Chair also queried why the results of the Price Waterhouse Coopers survey contradicted the findings of the LSP performance results.

In reply, Councillor Lorber confirmed that most children in Brent who attended schools outside the borough did so because they were attending faith schools. He also added that although there may be an increase in Eastern European families returning to their country of origin, the projections for 2014 suggested that pressure on school places, particularly on primary schools, would continue to increase due to a rise in the birth rate.

On the country of origin of unaccompanied overseas children, Councillor Lorber reported that a breakdown in terms of country of origin and age for unaccompanied children was not available but overall numbers were increasing.

Following a question on private housing developments, Councillor Lorber said that he felt that the private housing scheme by Granville Homes was a successful example of providing affordable housing during a recession, whilst Quintain were also to provide more affordable housing although they were pressing for more mixed use developments in the future. Councillor Lorber emphasised the importance that any evidence with regard to the impact of the recession was fact-based. There had already been an increase in those applying for and receiving Jobseekers allowance, however he warned that there was always a lag between the beginning of a recession and resulting job losses and bankruptcies. It was noted that information on the number of small businesses taking up rate relief could be provided.

With regard to the number of referrals for children to go into care, Councillor Lorber confirmed that numbers had increased, although the actual number of children in care was yet to rise. He stated that the recruitment of social workers was competitive in the employment market, however additional funding of £1.1 million had been made available to help with recruitment, training, staff support and retention, although it was too early to confirm that this tactic had been successful. Members heard that the Council's Improvement and Efficiency Strategy was not focused on budgets, but compared information with other local authorities. It had been acknowledged that there were not enough front line staff in a number of areas and Councillor Lorber stated that there were no current plans to cut manager posts in children's social care. There were also plans to strengthen governance arrangements with regard to ensuring appropriate safeguards were in place and that newly qualified staff were sufficiently monitored. Furthermore, Child Protection required effective joint working, with every effort made to ensure that all relevant parties were involved. Headteachers would be expected to report back to their governing bodies on a regular basis and most schools in the borough had a designated school governor to liaise with school staff on child protection matters.

Councillor Lorber confirmed that the tendering process with regard to WLA shared services of Adult Social Care was likely to commence at the beginning of 2010 and it was hoped that it would be completed in time for inclusion for the Council's budget for 2010-2011. The LSP was to be restructured to increase its' effectiveness and would provide added value, whilst the targets set were challenging and the performance figures for the 1st quarter would reveal what areas needed particular attention.

Joanna McCormack (Partnerships Co-ordinator, Policy and Regeneration) advised that the Local Area Agreement (LAA) was based on negotiations with partners of the LSP and the Government. Some targets were especially challenging, whilst others were of particular significance and relevance to Brent. The Price Waterhouse Coopers assessment looked at a much wider area of work.

The Committee agreed to the Chair's suggestion that the following information be provided:-

- Information on referrals to children's services for child neglect / safety issues, including whether referrals are increasing and was this attributed to Baby P or the recession.
- Information on the number of companies that have taken up the Council's reduction in business rates initiative that is being offered to small business during the recession.
- Information on the shared services agenda, specifically when the West London Alliance begins to commission services and details on how much this arrangement is saving the Council.

6. Transforming Adult Social Care: Modernising Day Opportunities for People with Learning Disabilities - Update on Progress

Lance Douglas (Assistant Director – Quality and Support, Housing and Community Care) introduced the report, who begun by stressing that consultation was a key element of the programme. The strategic theme of improving day opportunities for people came from the Government's Putting People First initiative, which formed the basis of how personalisation would work. The Learning Disabilities service was leading the transformation. Lance Douglas advised that it was important for progress to be made with regard to the re-provision and re-location of the Albert Road Day Centre site, with the John Billham Sports Ground identified as the preferred site. Actions that needed to be undertaken at the next stage included the need assessment of Albert Road and ASSPECTS day service users, with included approximately 350 assessments to be completed by the end of November 2009. An analysis on all service users' assessments of needs would be required to help formulate ideas on the future shape and types of services to be provided.

Lance Douglas advised that some changes had been made to the transformation programme following concerns raised by users and their carers during the extensive consultation that had been undertaken. The Committee noted that spending in Adult Social Care was not particularly high compared to other areas and that there was efficient use of the limited resources available.

Councillor R Moher stated that the issue had been raised as to whether some users would be capable of making decisions in respect of the assessment and she asked what steps were taken to ensure that the correct view of the user had been obtained. Councillor Mistry stated that although the budget for the transformation had been agreed, there was a lack of reassurance amongst users and carers about the service that would be provided. In addition, some users would not have the capacity to access the service on-line and there was a need to provide specialised transport.

The Chair acknowledged that a central aim of the transformation was to provide what the customer wanted, however she enquired whether a particular service could still be offered if, for example, only 2 customers had requested it. She sought an explanation as to how enough choices could be provided that were viable and could be funded. The Chair sought confirmation that direct payments could not be made to services provided by the Council, even if this was the user's preferred choice. She felt that the changes made since the consultation had been

positive and enquired whether funding had been identified for the Albert Road and ASPPECTS day service changes and if the analysis undertaken would be based on what could be delivered.

In reply, Lance Douglas felt that there was considerably more known about the users' views than previously, however a member of staff had been appointed to complete quality checks to ensure that users were capable of doing certain things and to be able to distinguish between what the aspirations of the users were and what was realistically achievable. Members heard that the Care Quality Commission had praised the Council's Quality Assurance Framework. Lance Douglas stated that although he understood the concerns of users and carers with regard to the future of the service, the target of 30% users of personal budgets had been set by the Department of Health, even though a target of 20% had originally been agreed within the LAA. Members noted that through personalised service, Council services could be used and that funding had been identified for the Albert Road and ASSPECTS day service changes. The analysis undertaken would be based on what resources were available.

The Chair commented that she felt that the carers needed to be re-consulted and she requested that an update on the transformation be provided at the meeting on the 9th February 2010.

7. Local Strategic Partnership Annual Report

Joanna McCormick introduced the annual report for 2009 which reported on the performance of Partners for Brent. Members heard that there had been significant progress in terms of the Evidence Base and there had been changes to governance arrangements to facilitate more effective partnership working. However, Partners for Brent faced a number of challenges for the future, not least the continuing impact of the recession on the community. In terms of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) 2006-2009, a Great Place to Live, a good performance had been recorded and it was expected that a Performance Reward Grant would be attained. For the LAA 2008/2011, the results were rather more mixed, however there had been an overall reduction in crime for 2008/09, including domestic violence as a result of the increase in support for victims. There had also been a 50% increase in the number of establishments signing up to the Best Bar None scheme, whilst alcohol related violence and disorder at Neasden Circle had been effectively tackled by the Neasden Circle Alcohol Project. The Brent Sustainability Forum had successfully delivered a number of projects, including Green Zones, North London Light Railway, Bio Digester, Sustainable Business and Trade Waste Recycling Promotion, Recycling from Flats and Creation of a Climate Change Partnership.

In terms of a Borough of Opportunity, Joanna McCormick advised that most LAA stretch targets for 2006-09 had been met, with some significantly overachieving. Members noted that the Smoking Cessation target had not been met, whilst final results were yet to be received with regard to Disadvantaged Groups into Employment. The Employer Partnership played a key role in addressing employment issues and the Committee noted the various ways in which this was achieved. Good progress had been reported with regard to the Children's Partnership Board, including all 5 of the Every Child Matters outcomes. Key achievements for 2008/09 concerning the Health and Social Care Partnership

Board were also noted, including the development of the Health and Well Being Strategy (including the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment). In terms of an Inclusive Community, Members noted the achievements with regard to Community Engagement, such as the Active Change Foundation, Brent Young Muslims Project and the Horn Stars Football Team Active Citizen Mentoring Programme.

Joanna McCormack then detailed future plans for Partners for Brent, paying particular emphasis on enhancing the work of the LSP through change of structure to allow it to divide its attention between delivery of the Community Strategy and the LAA and the engagement of people in the borough to have a better understanding of the key factors affecting their lives and the future of the borough.

Councillor R Moher, in noting the progress with regard to decline in teenage pregnancies and child obesity, enquired whether significant improvements had been recorded. Councillor Motley commented that the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee had received reports in respect of teenage pregnancies and that it had been re-classified from high risk to medium risk, however it was still a cause for concern. The rising trend for child obesity had been halted but remained a serious concern. Councillor Mistry stated that she had been involved with discussions with younger people with regard to anti-social behaviour and making the community safer. Although there were forums for young people, such as the Brent Youth Parliament, Councillor Mistry stated that young people had indicated that they did not feel engaged, nor were they aware of what services the Council could offer them. The Chair requested that evidence be provided of added value in future reports.

In reply, Joanna McCormick advised that there had only been a small decline in teenage pregnancies and that it was still an issue, whilst child obesity was a concern nationally. She confirmed that she would feedback the views of young people expressed to Councillor Mistry to the Brent Crime Partnership and she acknowledged Councillor Jones's request to incorporate evidence of added value in future reports.

8. Local Strategic Partnership Self Evaluation

Joanna McCormick gave a presentation on the LSP Self-Evaluation, which had been undertaken by Tribal Consulting through focus groups interviews and document review. A number of recommendations had been made on all aspects of the structure of the LSP. A key objective of the self evaluation was to improve the focus of partnership working through a number of ways, including focusing on the Community Strategy and ensuring key priorities were delivered through the LAA, mapping of strategic objectives, service planning with partners, better engagement with councillors and a coordinated support for partnership working. The Committee noted the new LSP structure, which would be led through the Strategic Forum and LSP Executive. The new structure would function through the alignment of governance and work programmes, embedding performance management and data quality and ensuring practical delivery of the LAA through thematic partnerships. Joanna McCormick advised that the LSP was required to cooperate with overview and scrutiny committees which would receive LSP forward plans and be provided with an annual report of the LSP and LAA. The overview and scrutiny committees would play a role in ensuring that the LSP was

making best use of resources, whilst the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would also be a member of the Strategic Forum.

The Chair indicated her wish that the Forward Plan of the LSP be provided at a future meeting and also be sent to chairs of all the overview and scrutiny committees.

9. Tubbs Road Councillor Call for Action Request

With the agreement of the Chair, Beatrice Barleon, representing residents of Tubbs Road and Nightingale Road, addressed the Committee on this item. Beatrice Barleon stressed that the main concern was the volume of traffic travelling down Tubbs Road and Nightingale Road. The problem was exacerbated by roadworks at the end of Tubbs Road and pollution caused by the large amount of traffic was also a concern. Beatrice Barleon explained that although Tubbs Road was classified as an 'A' road, it was a narrow road and this increased congestion for traffic that was using the road as a shortcut to the A40. Members heard that although Scrubs Lane was wider, it was not used as much as it was a longer route to the A40. Beatrice Barleon stated that residents wanted both short and long term solutions to the problems posed, suggesting that there be no right turn into the top of the road permitted and no left turn permitted out of the bottom of the road. She did not think that measuring traffic speed was necessary as it was not an issue and she stressed that the volume of traffic and the level of pollution be monitored and appropriate measures be put in place to reduce these. In reply to a query from Councillor Motley, Beatrice Barleon stated that residents had observed that there was a considerable number of vehicles turning left at the bottom of Tubbs Road.

With the agreement of the Chair, Councillor Powney, who had made the Councillor Call for Action request and who was ward councillor for the area concerned, also addressed the Committee on this matter. He stated that the protocol for Councillor Call for Action had been followed, explaining that there had been several meetings with local residents and the Transportation Unit had visited the site twice to consider the issues raised. In addition, TfL and the Department of Transport had also been consulted about the problems being experienced on these roads. He felt that a detailed solution was required to what was a complicated traffic problem. Councillor Powney stated that a request needed to be made to the Secretary of State to reclassify Tubbs Road as a 'B' road. In reply to a query from Councillor Motley, Councillor Powney stated that in his view Tubbs Road was being used by vehicles as the easiest route to by pass the Park Royal Estate.

During discussion by the Committee, Councillor Mistry, speaking on behalf of Councillor Joseph, stated that since a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) scheme was introduced to Tubbs Road, this had resolved the problem of vehicles being abandoned in the road. Nightingale Road similarly benefitted from having a CPZ introduced. However, as Tubbs Road was a relatively short road, the large volume of traffic on it often became congested. In addition, residents faced significant problems finding parking spaces along these roads from Friday evenings until Sunday evenings and therefore residents also wanted to be re-consulted over the operational times of the CPZ scheme. It was noted that Councillor Joseph would be happy to be involved in discussions over what measures could be undertaken. Councillor Thomas, ward councillor for the area

concerned, asserted that Tubbs Road had recorded the slowest moving traffic in the country for an A-road. He felt that the solution was to reclassify the road from an 'A' road to a 'B' road, however as the Council did not have powers to implement this, the Department for Transport would need to be approached. Councillor Clues commented that any measures to be considered for Tubbs Road should be considered within the context of providing a solution to traffic problems for the whole of Harlesden area.

The Chair felt that the protocol for the Councillor Call to Action had been followed correctly and Members agreed to her suggestion that the item be re-considered at the next meeting of this Committee, that the Transportation Unit and TfL representatives be invited to attend this meeting and that in the meantime, Members undertake a site visit to Tubbs Road.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that it be agreed that the Tubbs Road Councillor Call for Action Request be considered at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and that representatives from Transportation Unit and TfL be invited to attend this meeting to respond to questions from Members; and
- (ii) that Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertake a site visit of the roads prior to the next meeting.

10. Recycling in Flats Task Group

Councillor Clues, a Member of the task group, introduced the report. He stated that the Task Group focused on 4 themes, these being understanding residents to raise the profile of recycling, consideration of the resources available for recycling of waste from flats, making recycling easier, to communicate and educate the need for residents to participate in recycling and to consider appropriate signage. A number of site visits at a number of locations had been undertaken and recycling initiatives of other boroughs had also been investigated. Environmental Services had been involved in the task group's work, whilst the Environmental Project Team had also provided input. Councillor Clues stated that the Council's target of 40% recycling by 2011 was unlikely to be achieved unless sufficient recycling facilities were available for flats. He then drew Members' attention to the recommendations of the task group as set out in the report.

The Chair enquired whether the task group had encountered problems contacting registered social landlords (RSLs) during its investigation and what recommendations in the report were the highest priority.

In reply, Councillor Clues commented that there had been problems contacting some RSLs, however those who had come forward had shown enthusiasm in helping to increase recycling and in becoming recycling champions. He felt that the recommendation concerning clear and consistent signage was a high priority, as was the recommendation on exploring co-mingled recycling collection for flats, although this would depend on whether co-mingling would work and be cost effective.

The Chair thanked the task group for their work and the detailed and valuable report they had prepared. She enquired about an appropriate time to consider a review of the recommendations. Andrew Davies (Policy Officer, Policy and Regeneration) advised that it should be a minimum of 9 months before the issue was revisited in order that sufficient time was provided to report on any meaningful progress.

In the meantime, members agreed to the Chair's suggestion that an officer attend the meeting on the 9th February 2010 to provide an update.

11. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Chair commented that answers were still awaited concerning the Town Centre Task Group Follow Up. Andrew Davies (Policy and Performance Officer, Policy and Regeneration) advised Members that due to the number of items due to be considered at the December meeting, that some items may need to be deferred to a later meeting.

12. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Tuesday, 8th December 2009 at 7.30 pm.

13. Any Other Urgent Business

None.

The meeting finished at 9.50 pm.

L JONES