



MINUTES OF THE ONE COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE **Wednesday 5 December 2012 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Ashraf (Chair) and Councillors Hector (alternate for Councillor McLennan), Lorber, Pavey and Ketan Sheth

Also present: Councillor Jones (Lead Member for Customers and Citizens)

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Chohan, Colwill, McLennan and Mitchell Murray.

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 16 October 2012

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the last meeting held on 16 October 2012 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising

Complaints annual report

In reply to a query, Priya Mistry (Policy and Performance Officer, Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) advised that further information had been circulated to Members providing an explanation as to why compensation for adult and social care related complaints had increased despite the number of escalated complaints falling.

Working with families initiative

Phil Newby (Director of Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) agreed to provide further information in respect of a possible family nurse partnership scheme that had ultimately been rejected by the Primary Care Trust on grounds of cost.

4. Waste and street cleansing services - waste collection implementation

Chris Whyte (Head of Recycling and Waste, Environment and Neighbourhoods) introduced the report and advised that the present recycling rate had increased from around a 30% average for 2011/12 as of October 2011, to 45% for 2012/13 as of October 2012. Measures would continue to be introduced to boost the chances of ultimately attaining the recycling rate objective of 60%. Chris Whyte referred to a number of recent initiatives outlined in the report to increase recycling rates, such as provision of caddy liners to all properties currently receiving a separate food

waste collection and removal of grey refuse bins from households that were deemed to have over capacity. There had also been a successful bid leading to the receipt of grant funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government for the provision of a weekly collection of food waste from over 300 blocks of flats in the borough. A review and provision of the location of on-street recycling containers that would be relocated to more prominent places where appropriate would also be undertaken.

Turning to street cleansing, Chris Whyte advised that the street cleansing contract had been reduced by £2m in October 2011 as part of the review. In order to maintain street cleanliness standards, monitoring would be more focused on streets and areas in known problem areas and officers would dedicate more of their time in these specific locations and may include measures such as a second litter pick. Discussions were taking place with Community Engagement to deliver a concerted communications campaign to raise awareness of littering in Brent.

Chris Whyte informed the team that there had been an increase in reported fly-tipping this year. This could be attributed to the new household waste collection arrangements that restrict the volume of waste collected, the reduced frequency of street cleansing and increased commercial waste disposal charges. To address this, a restructuring of Recycling and Waste to create a new team, Environmental Crime Prevention, combining graffiti work and waste enforcement, would be undertaken to tackle such issues. Members heard that it was a priority to focus on waste enforcement, particularly in respect of business waste and fly tips. Chris Whyte advised that despite the reduction in resources in October 2011, cleansing scores had help up. In the longer term, the procurement of a public realm contract represented a significant piece of work that would have wider implications.

During discussion by Members, further explanation was sought as to what determined the removal of grey bins and could this lead to overspill or contamination of recycled waste. It was queried whether landlords were provided guidance with regard to waste to ensure that their tenants recycled waste properly and was there a database containing their details. The present recycling rate was noted and it was enquired what measures were being put in place to reach the ultimate target of 60% and when would this target be realised. Comparisons of recycling rates with other London boroughs were also sought. It was commented that some caddy liners were not being used and this could partly be attributed to their function not being explained clearly to residents and this area could be investigated further. With regard to educating residents of the importance of recycling, Councillor Lorber referred to the 'Green Zones' initiative of a few years ago, which he felt had been an effective, residents based scheme and at little financial cost and he enquired if such a campaign was to be revived. The use of 'chuggers' as used by charities could also be used to help persuade residents the benefits of recycling.

With regard to street cleansing, Members sought explanations as to the reasons why some areas would receive bespoke cleaning arrangements and what other areas as well as Harlesden Town Centre mentioned in the report received such services. Councillor Pavey requested a list of any such streets in the Barnhill ward. It was enquired if waste collection arrangements existed for charities. Details were sought with regard to the frequency of monitoring of street cleansing and were there any figures with regard to incidents of fly tipping and would this have a negative

impact on recycling rates. The Chair commented that recycling banks were often hotspots for fly tipping and could maps be provided highlighting where these hotspots were located in the borough. He added that relocating street recycling bins might go some way to addressing this issue. Members also sought further information in respect of progress being made with regard to the financial savings of the waste and street cleansing project.

In reply to the issues raised by Members, Chris Whyte advised that waste planning guidance based grey bins allocation on the size of the household and number of occupants. Where there was clearly an excessive number of grey bins, these would be removed and replaced with recycling bins. In the case of incidences of overspill or contamination of recycling waste, a measured approach would be taken depending on the individual circumstances of the household involved. Steps involved included writing to the household in advance advising them of the problems identified and what action they can take to address this and an involved dialogue would take place with residents to resolve the issue. The committee heard that any known landlords from the database were provided with guidance in respect of waste which they could then inform their tenants of, although it was acknowledged that sometimes a lack of information was a factor. However, efforts would be focused in particular on those living at the household to change their waste habits accordingly. The committee heard that separate arrangements with charity organisations were made with regard to waste collection.

Chris Whyte confirmed that the current 45% recycling rate was in line with the recycling model and it was felt that 50% would be achieved by 2014. He advised that the ultimate recycling target of 60% was ambitious and considerably higher than recycling rates for local authorities in urban areas. To reach such a target would require fundamental changes in the way that waste was handled, however new opportunities to increase the recycling rate further would be explored when pursuing the new waste and recycling contract. Members noted that Brent was estimated to be amongst the top seven highest London boroughs for recycling rates, with the highest being Bexley at 49%. With regard to the proposed communications campaign, this would focus on specific issues such as litter near schools and from fast food takeaways. Attempts would also be made to involve local community groups in providing information to help deliver the campaign. Chris Whyte advised that locations which frequently suffered from fly tipping were mapped and these could be provided to Members, however it was difficult to ascertain the reasons why these locations had been chosen, although they usually occurred at night time. Where fly tipping was a frequent occurrence at recycling banks, these would be removed. Chris Whyte explained that where there was evidence of street cleansing scores not holding up, which was usually in streets near busy high roads, resources would be applied accordingly to improve cleanliness. As well as Harlesden, there were also other locations, mainly in the south of the borough, where this was an issue and another example included Chaplin Road just off Ealing Road. Chris Whyte agreed to provide details of any streets in the Barnhill ward area where street cleansing scores had suffered to Councillor Pavey.

Turning to savings, Chris Whyte informed Members that the budget for street cleansing had been reduced, whilst the waste costings were not currently within budget this year as efficiency targets were not being met. Further improvements in performance were needed to address this, particularly as landfill tax costs

continued to rise. Chris Whyte advised that even though the overall amount of waste was reducing, it was not at a sufficient rate to keep up with the rising landfill costs. The reduction in waste had been 3%, however a 7% reduction was needed to reduce costs, whilst recycling would also need to be at 50%. Furthermore, the loss of a waste sorting facility at Park Royal following the West London Waste Authority's decision to withdraw it also hindered recycling rates. Members noted that the forecast overspend for 2012/13 was £560k.

Peter Stachniewski (Head of One Council Programme, Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) added that the savings targets had focused on reducing spending on street cleansing, whilst efficiency measures were put in place to achieve savings for waste collection. However, the waste collection savings did not deliver the savings anticipated and this area would need to be reconsidered. He advised that the largest single aspect of savings was achieved through preventing waste going to landfill and growth provision for landfill waste had been removed from the budget as an incentive to increase recycling, however landfill charges had continued to rise. Landfill waste had actually reduced from 103,000 tonnes to 100,000 tonnes, however this was still short of the 97,000 tonnes target.

5. Future Customer Services: Delivering changes to the way Brent residents access services

Margaret Read (Assistant Director – Brent Customer Services, Finance and Corporate Services) introduced the report that provided an update on progress in establishing new arrangements for Customer Services following the Future of Customer Services project and the creation of the Brent Customer Services Unit in January 2012. Margaret Read advised that the Future Customer Services Board was responsible for overseeing customer service arrangements and performance across all areas of the council and she referred to the changes implemented through the project and achievements to date as set out in the report, which included a new integrated e benefits form for Housing and Council Tax benefit. She then referred to the longer term aims and explained that a new content management system for web site would go live in early 2013 and would support a move to on line contact and the achievement of a wider channel migration strategy.. This would enable the council to be accessible to residents on a 24/7 basis. A digital post room was also to be created and this would complement the Civic Centre's design in supporting a paper light organisation. The review of post had identified that approximately 60% of post was scanned, whilst 40% was stored as a paper document. The digital post room would be created to ensure most post was scanned and routed electronically.

Margaret Read informed Members that most customer contact was still by telephone and all Brent Customer Services calls were managed by Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) and this was used by the schools admissions service, Children and Families information service and concessionary service, as well as Housing Needs, Registration and Nationalities and Brent Housing Partnership, whilst Benefits and Council Tax had used ACD for a number of years. The committee heard that ACD technology enables calls to be directed to the appropriate staff and provide clear visibility of the volume of the calls waiting and resources available to handle them. Ways of extending use of ACD technology to other service areas was being considered to develop a better overall picture of call volumes and performance for all services with a view to implementing this during 2013. Margaret

Read advised that telephone answering rates in Brent Customer Services ranged from 78% to 84% since January 2012 and greater consistency in the performance of individual teams had been achieved through increasing knowledge and skills sets for staff. She explained that the move to the Civic Centre and the impact of welfare reform would present significant challenges in the future and Brent Customer Services would play a key role in preparing and planning for these changes and mitigating the associated risks. This included designing and implementing a new localised Council Tax Support scheme and a local, discretionary welfare assistance scheme where the grant of £855k to be transferred to the council would be unable to meet the existing level of demand for payments. To help mitigate the forecast peaks in customer demand, the council was working with Capita to put a contingency plan in place.

During discussion by Members, further clarification was sought in respect of channel migration and increasing digital means of communication. It was queried why telephone performance in terms of percentage of calls answered for Children's Services for October 2012 was low compared to other service areas. Members commented that the higher answering rate for Children's Services in the summer of 2012 can be attributed to schools being much less busy, particularly as they would be closed for a large part of it and every effort should be made to increase the answering calls rate in this area as otherwise this leads to complaints from residents and present a reputational risk to the council. It was queried whether the telephone answering performance in Children's Services could be addressed through a major restructure and details of performance in November 2012 were sought and a request for telephone performance figures from the previous 12 months was made. It was also asked whether steps were being introduced to simplify the schools admissions processes in order to reduce the number of calls. It was suggested that as seasonal increases in demand on school admissions could be anticipated, resources could be redeployed appropriately, whilst a review of telephone performance in April 2013 could be undertaken and compared with this year to help provide a clearer picture of performance and demand. Assurances were sought that the online schools admissions applications system would be an improvement to the service and it was enquired what steps were being taken to increase uptake of online applications.

Members enquired what other service areas had online applications available or would soon be offering such a service. With regard to digital services, it was queried whether this would be available on mobile phones as well as computers and it was suggested that offering such services may disadvantage those on low incomes who may not have such devices and those who used pay as you go phones. A member commented that for some customers, face to face contact was the most appropriate or only form of contact available and it was enquired if there were any plans to change opening hours of some services. Another member stated that some residents had expressed concern that parking permits could no longer be provided by scratch cards and that their details would be stored centrally. This could be of particular concern, for example, if the number of times a particular individual, such as a health visitor, had parked at a certain location was recorded. It was also asked if there were any details with regard to the time taken to transfer a call to a relevant member of staff, the average duration of a call and whether a call back could be requested.

In reply to the issues raised, Margaret Read advised that there was presently a number of ways in which customers could access council services. Digital services, such as web or mobile apps, were the least expensive way of providing these and there was an overall move to reduce telephone use as a way of residents accessing services and increasing digital use. Margaret Read advised that Children's Services included school admissions and free school meals and that in the summer of 2012, the telephone response rate was very good at 90%. However, this was due to efforts being focused primarily on answering calls which had led to a detrimental effect on the rest of the service, which in turn generated more telephone calls and so there had since been change of focus in concentrating resources on providing the service of placing children in schools. Since this shift, the number of calls had reduced and this in turn had meant that the percentage of calls answered had risen to 71%. Margaret Read emphasised that concentrating resources on finding school places would protect the council's reputation. The use of the online school admissions application form for secondary schools was being actively promoted, whilst an automatic e-mail update informing residents of what schools had offered places to their children would also help reduce the volume of telephone calls. Online applications for school admissions to primary schools would also be introduced and this would allow more resources to be available in providing the service. Parents may also be called to be informed of any school places offered and it was also important to manage parents' expectations.

Margaret Read advised that online applications for other services, particularly those with a high number of transactions, would be considered as part of the digital migration strategy. She informed Members that the ACD system provided a call back facility for customers, however there may be some difficulty in obtaining telephone performance figures for Children's Services over the last 12 months as ACD was only introduced in January 2012. The committee heard that there were no plans to introduce a 24/7 telephone or face to face contact service and telephone services now ceased after 5.00pm on weekdays and no service on Saturdays due to the very low volume of calls that had been received during these times. There were also resource implications for extending face to face time and this would only be considered if demand for additional hours was identified and appropriate budgetary provision could be made. Margaret Read advised that equality impact assessments had been carried out in respect of specific initiatives to increase take up of online services such as schools admissions and parking services. A wider equalities impact would be undertaken when channel migration plans have been developed. She advised that the Contact Centre dealt with a heavy load of telephone calls and ultimately the plan was to reduce these calls through extending other ways of accessing services, particularly by digital means. Members noted that parking permits would soon be available online and that feedback received had suggested that customers preferred to acquire their parking permits or pay penalty charge notices through this method.

Toni McConville (Director of Customer and Community Engagement) added that visitor parking permits can also be obtained online and she advised that there was potential for fraud under the previous scratch card system. She explained that the council's website was to be redesigned in order to provide a mobile platform which could provide 24/7 access where possible. There were no present plans to extend face to face contact and in future more transactions would be undertaken online, as well as advice and links to relevant services. Toni McConville also commented that

residents had not voiced any disquiet when Saturday opening ceased, however the council would respond to demand accordingly.

Councillor Jones (Lead Member for Customers and Citizens) added that any decision with regard to providing services online would be subject to a strong business case.

The Chair agreed to Phil Newby's suggestion that the parking project could be considered at a future meeting. The Chair also requested that improvements in percentage of telephone performance and in processes be included in future reports.

6. The One Council Programme - second update - 2012/13

Phil Newby advised Members that due to Fiona Ledden's (Director of Legal and Procurement) absence, the procurement project update would be deferred to the next meeting and members noted the briefing note on this had been circulated.

Peter Stachniewski then introduced the main report which provided an update on the One Council programme. He explained that a report on the One Council programme finances had been considered by the Budget and Finance Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 December 2012. It was confirmed that the programme had delivered £11.7m benefits in 2010/11 and £29.5m in 2011/12, a total of £41.2m per annum since the programme had commenced. Financial benefits of £13.4m were forecast for 2012/13, taking cumulative benefits to £54.6m and by the programme's end in 2014/15, a total benefit of £77.9m per annum had been budgeted for. Peter Stachniewski advised that seven new projects were now being delivered, whilst Special Educational Needs had moved from red to amber status, although Project Athena remained red, however the resolving of human resources issues and strengthening of partnership governance arrangements meant it was likely to move to amber soon, whilst procurement was also red. Peter Stachniewski confirmed that the web enhancement project had just moved to amber following a Project Board meeting on 4 December 2012. Another important area of work was the governance arrangements of projects such as working with families. The committee heard that internal change communications had strengthened considerably, facilitating managers and their staff's ability to prepare and adapt to change. The most significant risk to the programme remained the delivery of financial benefits, although overall the risks were well monitored and managed. The most significant non-financial risk was the management of stakeholders and ensuring buy in. Members noted the financial and non-financial benefits as set out in the report.

During discussion, it was noted that phase two of working with families was due to be completed in July 2013 and it was queried how its' success was measured and what financial savings had the project achieved. Members asked whether any further waves of staff and structure changes were planned and how was the council addressing the challenge of staff that had left the council or moved to another service area. Concern was expressed that often talented staff had left the council and the impact this may have on the service and it was queried whether the setting up of a pool for highly merited staff to ensure they remained with the council could be undertaken. It was suggested that there should be a section in the report stating financial disbenefits, such as in the increase in fly tipping, and that in identifying

these to look into whether a review of these measures should be undertaken. It was also stressed that showing straightforward efficiencies rather than financial reductions should be highlighted in the report and it was asked what the manager to staff ratio target was.

In reply, Peter Stachniewski advised that the benefits of a project were often longer term and not necessarily seen immediately after project closure. The savings target for working with families was £700k next year for placement costs, however the impact of early intervention needed to be factored in along with a number of other variables and there were risks associated with the project. Peter Stachniewski added that firm targets would need to be set for the project in 2013/14, however it continued to be reviewed in the meantime. With regard to the staff and structure review, Corporate and Business Support was presently being reviewed as part of the move to the Civic Centre and a further £1.5m saving had been identified. However, every effort would be made to minimise compulsory redundancies and any reductions in staff would be focused on agency staff where possible, although it was inevitable that the savings would impact upon staff. Peter Stachniewski stressed that every effort was made to minimise the impact of losing staff. He acknowledged that the savings from some projects impacted upon services and consideration would be given as to how future reports could highlight disbenefits. The committee also heard that efficiencies as opposed to just savings could also be outlined, although these were often less clear to demonstrate. Peter Stachniewski confirmed that the manager to staff ratio target was 1:6 and presently the ratio was 1:5.5.

Irene Bremang (Programme Management Office Manager, Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) advised that in respect of the working with families project, those families with difficulties needed to be monitored and the appropriate infrastructure needed to be provided to facilitate this. She explained that consultation, support and assistance were provided during staff changes, such as preparing staff for interviews, CV writing courses and preparation for working for other organisations other than the council. Staff could be redeployed to other roles and there was a range of other support services were also available. In addition, an internal project pool had been set up and some staff who had been displaced were used to support delivery of One Council projects. Irene Bremang advised that disbenefits were also potential risks with some projects, such as risks to stakeholders and these also needed to be monitored.

Phil Newby advised that the Programme Board focused on what the outcomes of the projects' objectives were, including those involving any associated partners. Since the One Council programme had begun, a huge learning process had been undertaken, such as new ways of working and changes had been made where problems had been encountered. Furthermore, the way in which the findings were reported were constantly evolving and Phil Newby advised that cost avoidance and efficiencies could be highlighted in future reports.

7. One Council Overview and Scrutiny work programme

Members had before them the work programme for their consideration. The Chair sought clarification in respect of Councillor Colwill's request to place items on Special Educational Needs (SEN) statements and school places. In reply, Phil Newby advised that both these areas were under the remit of the Children and

Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and in view of this, members agreed that it was appropriate for these items to be referred to that committee and accordingly taken off the work programme of the One Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

8. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the One Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Wednesday, 6 February 2013 at 7.30 pm.

9. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 10.10 pm

J Ashraf
Chair