



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE SELECT COMMITTEE Wednesday, 9 December 2009 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Dunn (Chair), Councillor HB Patel (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Bessong, Butt, Mendoza and Van Kalwala

Apologies were received from: Councillors Matthews (Lead Member for Crime Prevention and Public Safety)

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 28 October 2009

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the last meeting held on 28 October 2009 be agreed as an accurate record subject to the following amendment:-

6th line, 3rd paragraph, page 5, replace 'continued use of the' with 'proposed'.

3. Matters Arising

None.

4. In-depth Review of Local Area Agreement Priorities: Priority 1 - Crime Prevention 18-28 Age Group and Priority 3 - Violent Crime

The Chair welcomed Mark Toland (Borough Commander, Brent Police) to the meeting who gave a presentation on this item. Mark Toland began by stating that Brent was classified as a trident borough which meant the police specifically targeted the high incidences of shootings and murders amongst black members of the community. Some areas of the borough had high levels of deprivation and although it was one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in the UK, race crime levels were relatively low. He then provided Members with some crime statistics in Brent, including:-

- 12% of all crime committed was classified as violent crime, including robberies and serious violence

- Total recorded offences committed was 27,193 in 2008/09, compared to 35,582 in 2004/05
- 1,680 robberies recorded in 2008/09, compared with 2,084 in 2004/05
- 3,075 incidences of vehicle crime in 2008/2009, compared with 4,209 in 2004/05
- 83 incidences of gun crime in 2008/09, compared with 164 in 2006/07
- 502 incidences of knife crime in 2008/09, compared with 526 in 2006/07

Mark Toland commented that the statistics had shown that crime overall had been falling in Brent over the last five years, however confidence in the police remained low at 28%, the lowest of all London boroughs. The police were undertaking a number of initiatives to improve their image and help prevent crime amongst young adults. This included visiting schools and tackling anti-social behaviour on buses and improving relationships with the local and national press. The police had also agreed a Joint Community Safety Strategy with the Council and its partners. Mark Toland then highlighted some of the police's achievements, such as the 'Not Another Drop' against knife crime campaign, the Safer Neighbourhoods scheme and successful operations involving residents in Stonebridge, South Kilburn and Harlesden which had led to better relations with the community. He added that following a complaint from the Hillside Housing Association, 23 arrests had been made in relation to drug dealing activities. A similar operation in Church End had resulted in 36 arrests.

Mark Toland then focused on initiatives to tackle crime in future, stating that one of the areas of concern was the need to address the 15% rise in burglaries Brent, an upward trend experienced by most London boroughs. The Select Committee heard that a Hub Team had been set up to patrol Wembley Central and worked closely with the British Transport Police, whilst a Team also specifically covered Harlesden Town Centre. From January 2010, a series of road shows were also planned to inform the community of the police's activities, with venues such as schools and churches being used in order to reach large audiences. A mail-out of dvds to residents containing information about the police was also being considered. In order to ensure maximum use of resources, single patrols would be allocated to places where appropriate. A pledge would also be launched, detailing what service the police would provide and when they would be expected to respond to the various categories of crime.

Mark Toland concluded that although the last four years had seen a downward trend in crime, initial statistics for 2009/10 had witnessed a rise, however he was confident that this would be addressed by the end of year, with an emphasis on tackling the rise in burglaries. He stressed the role of the public of informing the police of any suspicious activity.

Gerry Renard (Interim Head of Community Safety Team) also addressed Members. The Select Committee heard that Priority 1 of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) was prevention of crime amongst 18-25 year olds, with crime ranging from petty crime to higher end offences or serious acquisitive crime. Gerry Renard advised that achieving a fourth annual successive reduction in robberies for 2009/10 was unlikely because of the rise in this type of crime earlier in the year, whilst vehicle theft remained low. Members heard that two successful drugs operations, Ladden and Soto had resulted in a number of arrests of front line and higher level drug

dealers. Gerry Renard then explained that Priority 3, crime involving the most serious violence and assault with injury, was the other crime-related LAA priority and this included incidences of domestic violence. Crimes of this type had risen year by year since 2006/07 and this was partly attributable to increased reporting of domestic violence as a result of greater confidence in police response. Members noted that the police had formed a Domestic Violence Squad and this area received support from magistrates through the setting-up of a domestic violence court and support from voluntary sector organisations.

Gerry Renard continued by informing Members of a 'Three Strikes and You're Out' initiative by Brent Transport Police, where upon youths would have their oyster card removed and their parents informed if they had committed three anti-social acts on public transport. The Anti-Social Behaviour Team had played a role in the closure of premises of anti-social behaviour, including drug-related activities. The Select Committee heard that Tesco's and Ikea had been approached with regard to the possibility of sponsoring police DVDs.

During discussion by Members, Councillor Van Kalwala asked how funds were accurately targeted at youth offenders and what measures were being undertaken to address the underlying reasons for crime committed by young people. He also enquired how police were being informed of incidences of gun and knife crime. Councillor H B Patel welcomed the progress in crime reduction overall and stressed the need to improve the police's public perception and provide information of what the police did, adding that many residents were unsure of what action the police could take and of the speediness of their response to a call. He enquired if consideration was being given to introducing curfews for young persons in particular areas that were regarded as hotspots of anti-social behaviour. It was also asked whether police provided information of their activities in Brent Magazine. Councillor Mendoza enquired if there was a crime prevention and engagement strategy and what areas had been identified as trouble spots.

The Chair commented that residents of an estate in South Kilburn seemed much more relaxed following a recently successful police operation in the area, although there was concern that the problems would return once the perpetrators were released from prison. He cited a project in Wales which removed troubled families from their present environment to provide them with the opportunity to help themselves. The cost of moving a family was approximately £39,000 a year, whilst for a single child to go into care the cost was approximately £40,000 a year. The Chair sought reasons for the rise in burglaries and fall in robberies and further details with regard to the rise in most serious violence incidents. He asked what measures were being undertaken to prevent drug use amongst young people. The Chair informed Members that he had observed safety of children on buses to be an issue during a recent visit to Kingsbury High School and he asked what scope there was for organisations such as the Safer Neighbourhood Team to work with schools to address this issue. Details of what action to improve interaction with young Afro-Caribbean males was sought. The Chair also commented that it would be useful to have a more systematic reporting of drug prevention initiatives to councillors and the community as a whole.

In reply to the issues raised, Mark Toland advised Members that many of those arrested during the South Kilburn operation were not from the area and he concurred that the residents on the estate seemed much happier. He explained

that there were a number of initiatives to prevent youth crime, such as visiting schools, mediation projects, a volunteer cadet scheme and police officers engaging in sporting activities with young people. Members heard that the NHS in Strathclyde were taking a leading role in a Family Intervention Programme which identified families whose children had been involved in crime and such a measure could be considered for Brent in the future. Mark Toland stated that the relevant agencies shared information which facilitated identifying young offenders, although only a small proportion were committing serious offences. However, he stressed the need to address such behaviour amongst young people at an early stage.

Mark Toland advised that there were no proposals for curfews, however there were some dispersal areas that applied to young people where anti-social behaviour was a problem and such behaviour could be reported to the child's parents. Safer Neighbourhood Teams visited approximately 1,000 addresses within a ward and a possible future measure could include 'Street Week Initiative' where a particular street is allocated to be visited during a given week. Mark Toland advised that one of the reasons that burglary might be on the increase, and street robbery on the decrease, is that it did not involve the risks of being identified that robbery involved. The increased incidents of stop and search in Brent also discouraged robbers. The Select Committee was advised that a change in definition of most serious violence was partly attributable to the rise in such incidents, as well as there being more reported incidents of domestic violence as a result of increased confidence in reporting such crimes to the police.

To assist drug use prevention in young people, Mark Toland explained that street robbers were drug tested when arrested and referred to drug referral workers if they tested positive, whilst an operation concerning rough sleepers in the borough also investigated possible drug use. Members noted that it was a big challenge keeping those who had been referred in drug treatment and that drug taking involved those from all socio-economic backgrounds and ages. Mark Toland advised that the Police Advisory Group worked with school headteachers to address safety of children on buses. A number of initiatives were being used to improve police communication with ethnic minorities, including interaction through sporting activities and improved relations with young people in Stonebridge. Mark Toland suggested that Brent could consider a scheme run by Southwark Police involving role playing in stop and search DVDs. Significant funding had been allocated to preventative and engagement measures and a meeting with partners was taking place on 15th December 2009 to discuss such matters further. Members heard that young people were particularly vulnerable to being targeted for recruitment by gangs and this was an area of concern that needed to be taken into account. Mark Toland advised that crime could be reported to the police in various ways, including by telephone, e-mail and text and that any other suggestions for reporting crime were welcomed. Members also heard that councillors could make statements on behalf of residents with regard to anti-social behaviour and that articles regularly appeared in Brent Magazine updating residents on police activities.

Gerry Renard added that it was intended to extend the Family Intervention Programme in Brent and to acquire more case workers. The programme identified social landlords who agreed to accommodate families so that they could move from their present location. The Youth Offending Team also undertook a lot of work targeting young people who were in trouble. Stalls were also set up in streets to

explain to parents the risks and signs of being involved in drug related activities for young people.

The Chair thanked Mark Toland and Gerry Renard for the presentation.

5. **Options for Revenues and IT Delivery from 2011**

Margaret Read (Head of Revenue and Benefits) introduced the report which summarised the outcome of the options appraisal for Revenue and IT services as the existing Capita contract expires on 30 April 2011. The appraisal considered what type of model and vehicle delivery was desired. The three main options considered were:-

- Providing the service in-house
- Shared service with another council
- Re-tender of the contract with the same or a revised scope

A soft market targeting involving research to establish potential market interest in a Brent contract was undertaken as part of the assessing the re-tendering option. The Select Committee heard that it was difficult to establish the type of financial modelling required for a shared service option as there was no other London borough operating in this way to undertake a benchmarking exercise.

Margaret Read then drew Members' to the various advantages and disadvantages of each option as set out in the report. She advised that it was felt that both the in-house and the re-tendering options offered potential to improve on the existing performance, however the in-house option was unlikely to be the most cost effective option. In addition, there was a risk of potential loss of key management and specialist support resources and the loss of shared risk incorporated in the current arrangements. There was also little prospect of developing a successful shared partnership with another local authority in the timescales available. Margaret Read advised that re-tendering of the service was perceived to provide the most cost effective and successful option if the specification included some or even all provision of customer service for revenues. Research had indicated that there was likely to be sufficient market interest to ensure that the Council secured a competitive procurement environment that would provide value for money. It was therefore recommended that the re-tendering option be pursued and that consideration be given to increasing the scope of the contract to provide customer service for Council Tax or a re-configuration of existing arrangements with the One Stop Service to increase effectiveness.

During discussion by Members, Councillor H B Patel commented that the shared service option did not seem to be a realistic one and there were value for money issues with the in-house option. He sought views regarding what Capita's intentions were with regard to a possible future contract. Councillor Butt asked what the Council Tax collection rates were for London boroughs who provided the service in-house and suggested that an in-house arrangement would be beneficial and staff could be transferred under TUPE arrangements. Councillor Mendoza sought views as to the potential of the three options to increase revenue from Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) collection.

The Chair enquired whether extending the scope and length of the contract would be more attractive to potential tenderers and if it was intended to add future clauses for under performance in the event of a contract being awarded to an external organisation. With regard to a change of contractor, the Chair asked what steps would be taken to ensure that knowledge and skills would be captured from the previous arrangement and would TUPE arrangements for those who had been CAPITA employees apply. He enquired what the next steps were with regard to pursuing the preferred option.

In reply, Margaret Read advised that any external contract sought would be on a five year basis with a three year extension, the same arrangement as the present contract. Of the eight organisations contacted with regard to the re-tender option, all had expressed a preference to control customer contact and it was felt that the existing arrangements were too constrained in respect of this. Members noted that clauses with regard to under-performance were already in place with the existing contract, with the ability to serve a default notice and such arrangements were likely to be pursued in any future agreement. Margaret Read advised that should an alternative contractor be chosen, it was likely that the Council would pursue TUPE arrangements to retain staff and the knowledge and skills base and that transitional arrangements would be in place in such circumstances. The Select Committee heard that Capita were keen to continue working with the Council and to address the constraints in the existing contract for any future arrangements.

Margaret Read commented that Council Tax collection of those boroughs that had in-house arrangements varied and because of the wide variety of demographics involved, it was difficult to make accurate comparisons with other models. She advised that an in-house service would be 5% more expensive overall and it would also require operating NNDR collection which currently benefitted from shared resources with Capita. In view that the shared risk element would also be lost, it was reiterated that outsourcing was clearly the more cost effective option. Margaret Read added that there was also concern as to whether IT would have the capacity to support the in-house option. Members noted that both in-house and tendering out options had the potential to improve Council Tax collection, but there was less risk involved with the latter. Margaret Read advised that a report was to be considered by the Executive in January 2010 recommending the re-tendering option, with the results of first stage of re-tendering reported in February 2010 and the awarding of the contract due in November/December 2010.

Duncan McLeod (Director of Finance and Corporate Resources) added that as there would be an IT link between Council Tax collection and Benefits with the in-house option, an IT failure in any area would mean the whole system going down.

The Chair requested that further information be provided to Members on the cost differentials between in-house costings and external costings, such as the in-house costs the Council would solely need to bear, and what the shared costs would be for the re-tendering option.

RESOLVED:-

that the report on Options for Revenues and IT Delivery from 2011 be noted.

6. **Complaints Annual Report 2008/09**

Susan Riddle (Corporate Complaints Manager, Policy and Regeneration Unit) introduced the Complaints Annual Report for 2008/09 and confirmed that complaints made to the Local Government Ombudsman were at the lowest for a number of years. Figures to date for 2009/10 suggested that these numbers would remain low. However, Susan Riddle warned that although complaints under the Council's procedure had also fallen at the first stage of the complaints process, there had been an increase in complaints being escalated to the second and third stages across the service areas. This highlighted the need to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity. Susan Riddle reported that the new Adult Social Care Complaints Process launched in April 2009 had performed well and other areas of the Council could benefit from using similar processes.

Councillor Bessong sought more information on the review of the complaints process and asked if the relevant contacts were actively publicised for those wishing to submit a complaint. Councillor Mendoza enquired about the number of complaints submitted by frequent complainers. Councillor Van Kalwala enquired if statistics were available breaking down complaints submitted according to ethnicity and asked if residents were being informed of the need to identify their ethnic background. He also asked if there were resource limitation issues with regard to retrieving some information.

The Chair sought further details as to what measures were undertaken to attempt to resolve a complaint at stage one of the complaints process.

In reply, Susan Riddle stressed the need for proper engagement with the complainant at the first stage in order to resolve the complaint as soon as possible and the Complaints Team were working closely with service areas to address. She advised that the present economic circumstances had seen a rise in the number of complaints involving compensation claims. The Select Committee noted that the Complaints Process was due to be reviewed this year and that there had been an earlier internal audit review of it. The internal audit review focused on processes and had identified that some service areas were not meeting corporate objectives and work was being undertaken to address this. Information on the Complaints Process was also available on the Council's website, at post offices and medical centres in the borough and at area consultative forums and service user forums.

Susan Riddle advised that there were only a small number of complaints submitted by frequent complainers although each complaint was taken seriously. Only a small proportion of complainants provided details of their ethnicity on the complaints form and it was felt that this was because many felt the information irrelevant or that it would disadvantage them in some way. In addition, some complaints were not submitted using the Council's complaint form. The low uptake of providing ethnic information was reflected across London boroughs as a whole. However, Susan Riddle advised that community groups were being approached and informed of the need to provide ethnicity details. Members heard that it was a time consuming process in obtaining information on complainants from the service areas, although future links to the Client Database Index would make this easier and quicker. It was also noted that Social Care tended to receive the largest proportion of complainants providing ethnic details.

Duncan McLeod (Director of Finance and Corporate Resources) added that the proportion of ethnicity details provided in complaints submitted to Revenue and Benefits was also very low.

The Chair concluded by welcoming the continuing overall decrease in complaints received.

RESOLVED:-

that the Complaints Annual Report 2008/09 be noted.

7. **Brent 2009 Residents Attitude Survey**

Cathy Tyson informed Members of results of the most recent Brent Residents' Attitude Survey. She suggested that the methodologies employed during the survey made it more robust in comparison with the 2009 Place Survey, in particular it was felt that it provided a fairer reflection of the improvements the Council had undertaken to deliver better quality services to residents. The Select Committee heard that Residents Attitude Survey was based on face to face interviews with 2,243 people aged 16 years and over at their homes. Cathy Tyson then drew Members' attention to the results of the survey, with 65% of residents expressing overall satisfaction with the way the Council operates its services, an improvement of 17% from the previous Residents Attitude Survey in 2005 and the highest recorded satisfaction levels since the surveys had begun in 1990. By contrast, the Place Survey had recorded a decline in satisfaction levels from 52% in 2006/07 to 45% in 2009. Other headline Residents Attitude Survey results for 2009 included:-

- 83% satisfaction in area as a place to live, up from 75% in 2005
- 25% felt their area had improved, 23% that it had got worse and 40% that it had not changed much, compared with 27% who thought it had got worse and 37% that it had not changed much in 2005.
- 51% thought there was a strong sense of community, compared with 37% in 2005
- 74% thought that Brent is a place where people from different cultural backgrounds get on well together
- 32% felt that they could influence decisions in their local area, an issue that the Council needs to focus on

Cathy Tyson advised that residents perceived levels of crime as the issue most needing improvement, followed by activities for teenagers, road and pavement repairs, clean streets and level of traffic congestion. This mirrored the results from 2005, with activities for teenagers up from fourth to second, clean streets down from second to fourth and road and pavement repairs down from second to third. Satisfaction levels increased in 24 of the 28 services surveyed since 2005, with the 86% satisfaction in refuse collection and 81% in recycling facilities reflecting the Council's upgraded waste contract and the introduction of compulsory recycling. The single largest increase in satisfaction for local services was 18% in sports facilities. Members heard that there had also been a decrease in dissatisfaction for 19 of the 28 service areas surveyed since 2005, with the largest decrease of 11% in public conveniences. Less than 10% thought Council services had got worse, 18% better and 63% about the same. Cathy Tyson explained that the 36% of

respondents who felt that the Council provided good value for money, a 10% increase from 2005, reflected increased communication with residents, and 59% of residents felt that the quality of Council services overall was good. The Select Committee noted that there had been a significant rise in those using the Council's website as a source of information about the Council, up to 22%.

During discussion, Councillor Van Kalwala commented that the survey only questioned 1% of the Brent population and he enquired how the methodology could be regarded as robust. He asked the reasons why there was a four year gap between each Residents Attitude Survey and whether increased frequency would drive up costs. He also sought details of the response rate for the Place Survey.

The Chair commented that less frequent, but higher quality surveys were preferable to higher frequency but lower quality and that it was important that the methodology used was robust.

In reply, Cathy Tyson advised that the Residents Attitude Survey had the largest sample of people ever used for a Council survey and that Ipsos MORI who had undertaken the survey had advised that the sample was a sufficient size for the Brent population. Interviewers had received appropriate training to ensure that residents were not influenced in any way during the questioning. Members noted that increasing the frequency of the survey would compromise quality due to costs and it was felt that it was better and more useful to have higher quality surveys. The Select Committee also heard that the Residents Attitude Survey allowed for the results to be analysed on a ward basis.

Cathy Tyson advised that there had only been approximately a return of 1,500 out of 5,000 surveys sent out for the Place Survey and that it was a requirement that every local authority undertake this as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment set of indicators. There was no flexibility to change the prescribed methodology, however the Place Survey did not take into account a number of issues specific to Brent, such as the proportion of residents where English language was not their first language.

RESOLVED:-

that the report on the Brent 2009 Residents Attitude Survey be noted.

8. Community Use of Council Owned Buildings - Update on the Implementation of Recommendations

The Chair asked that this item be deferred to a future meeting because of time constraints. He also requested that the report include more detail.

9. Performance and Finance Select Committee Work Programme 2009/10

The Work Programme for 2009/10 was noted.

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

None.

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

None.

12. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Performance and Finance Select Committee was scheduled for Tuesday, 16 February 2010 at 7.30 pm.

13. **Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

The meeting closed at 9.50 pm

A DUNN
Chair