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MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE Wednesday 12 August 2015 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Filson (Chair) and Councillors Daly, Farah, Kelcher, Stopp, Miller and Tatler, together with co-opted members Mr Alloysius Frederick, Dr J Levison and Mr Payam Tamiz

Also Present: Councillors Choudhary, Mahmood and Pavey

Apologies were received from: Councillor Colwill, co-opted Member Ms Christine Cargill and appointed observer Lesley Gouldbourne

1. **Declarations of interests**

None declared.

2. **Deputations**

None.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes were tabled at the meeting. Members agreed to approve them as an accurate record but asked to be allowed to raise any matters arising at the next meeting.

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 July 2015 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. **Matters arising (if any)**

See above.

5. **Council's future Transport Strategy**

Members considered the report on the Council's future transport strategy. The Chair welcomed Councillor Southwood (Lead Member for Environment) and Tony Kennedy (Head of Transportation) to the meeting. Councillor Southwood explained that the strategy presented a long term framework and needed to be seen in conjunction with supporting strategies that provided more detail such as the cycling strategy. In future years a walking strategy and a freight strategy would be developed.

The Committee heard from Councillor Choudhary and two members of the public: Mr Dilwyn Chambers and Mr David Kaye. The comments put forward included the view that there were gaps in the strategy because there was a lack of reference to the potential for developing rail links with specific reference being made to the Dudden Hill rail line. The committee heard criticism that the strategy did not mention global warming or air quality; did not pick up on the uses that could be made of the canals and did not address the transport difficulties caused by Wembley Stadium on event days. There was criticism of London TravelWatch which it was suggested appeared to have achieved little in the way of improvements to transport in the borough. It was pointed out that Kilburn High Road served one of only two town centres in the borough and yet was not mentioned in the strategy. This was also an example of where the Council had to work with a neighbouring borough and the issue of inter-borough conflict at the borough's boundaries was not picked up in the strategy.

The Committee expressed concern that the strategy was too brief and lacked ambition. Members felt that it lacked evidence in places whilst making certain assertions and was rooted in the possibilities as they related to Transport for London (TfL) and the availability of funding rather than going beyond this into areas where the Council needed to send out strong messages and councillors needed to lobby to address some of the major transport concerns in the borough.

Members of the Committee in considering the strategy raised the following points:

- the strategy appeared to have been overly influenced by the feedback to the consultation and restricted itself to those areas listed in paragraph 6.1 of the covering report,
- there was a lack of information on the budgets available for improvements to transport,
- reference to the Council's Disabled Transport Fleet and working with other Council departments to improve accessibility was missing,
- the strategy did not articulate or reflect the needs of the borough in order to support future Local Implementation Plan (LIP) annual spending submissions,
- evidence, including demographic data was not included to show the effect car clubs had in different areas of the borough,
- the objective to reduce the number of car journeys by changing behaviour to avoid unnecessary trips was not included, along with more information on the level of car ownership and trends in the borough,
- whilst recognising that the cycle strategy provided more information, it was felt that reference should be included on the barriers to cycling and the different types of traffic calming measures employed,
- the target for agreeing travel plans with schools needed to be more ambitious than the stated 10% increase,

- the strategy should address the implications of the introduction of the night time tube service,
- there was a lack of evidence of what the most effective ways to reduce car speeds were and there was concern about the level of enforcement within 20mph zones,
- given the continued uncertainty over the expansion of Heathrow, concern was expressed that aspects of the strategy were dependent on this and it was not clear what the Council's current position on Heathrow was,
- the strategy should incorporate the major health provision reconfigurations within the borough and the implications this had for transport to hospitals, other health facilities and hospital parking,
- it was felt that the strategy should address not just equality of access for those with disabilities but the disparity between different areas of the borough,
- whilst supporting the air quality targets, mention was made of the importance of monitoring and the need to address the health issues around the use of diesel fuel,
- in making many of the points referred to, the Committee felt the strategy needed to incorporate more of the cross cutting work being undertaken within the Council.

Given the extent of the comments made by members of the Committee, it was felt that the document was not ready to be submitted to Cabinet for approval.

Councillor Southwood and the Head of Transportation accepted that some of the targets contained in the strategy could be increased and that the overall level of ambition demonstrated in the document could be strengthened. However, it was pointed out that this was an overarching strategy with other sub-strategies supporting it and it was open to review every 5 years as the situation and challenges facing the borough changed.

RESOLVED:

that Cabinet be informed that:

- (a) Scrutiny Committee recommends that Cabinet defer taking a decision on approving the Long Term Transport Strategy for Brent so that fuller consideration can be given to the points raised on it by the Committee;
- (b) Scrutiny Committee requests that Cabinet note the comments made by the Committee and agrees to the recommendations below being more fully addressed in the finally agreed strategy:
 - (i) the strategy needs to be more ambitious and incorporate reference to schemes on which the Council might need to lobby in order to see them progress,

- (ii) the strategy should not be restricted to only those schemes and improvements that might be supported by TfL and included in LIP submissions, especially bearing in mind the forthcoming London Mayoral election when a new Mayor will be elected who might have different priorities; there was a need for the serious public transport issues and road usage problems to be addressed,
- (iii) reference should be included of the Dudden Hill rail line and its potential,
- (iv) the possibility of a conflict of approach with neighbouring boroughs and the need to develop shared visions with other boroughs on those transport issues at the borough boundary should be articulated,
- (v) greater focus should be given on equality of access from the different geographical areas of the borough (North/South – East/West),
- (vi) a review of the document should be undertaken to remove some of the assertions made or support them with more evidence based statements and give a clearer focus to the strategy, bearing in mind that many of the ‘daughter’ strategy papers have yet to be written,.
- (vii) the strategy should include demographic evidence and have a greater focus on access to primary locations such as hospitals, schools, leisure centres etc.,
- (viii) greater prominence should be given to the work being undertaken with schools to improve safety and congestion around schools,
- (ix) a stronger message should be included on the health effects of diesel and the implications of this around the movement of freight.

6. **Food Standards Audit**

Members considered the report on last year’s Food Standards audit of the Council’s discharge of its Food Standards Act 1990 duties. The Chair welcomed Councillor Denselow (Lead Member for Stronger Communities) and David Thrale (Head of Regulatory Services) to the meeting. Councillor Denselow stated that he recognised the concern about the capacity to carry out the over due inspections but pointed out that the Council was being expected to provide the same level of service as it had done in past years when the Council was better funded. At the same time the borough had a rising population and more premises to inspect. The number of outstanding inspections now stood at 192 and he assured the Committee that these would be dealt with by the end of the year by utilising additional resources from elsewhere in the service. In the meantime Regulatory Services was undergoing a review which would need to establish the basis for being able to sustain the service in the future. The Food Standards Authority would be visiting the Council during the following week and Councillor Denselow undertook to ensure Scrutiny Committee was informed of the outcome to this.

The Head of Regulatory Services explained the staffing structure and the challenges facing the team. In response to questions, he explained the rationale behind not prioritising the higher category inspections. It was the smaller businesses that often created more work in bringing them into compliance.

Councillor Denselow emphasised the financial pressures by explaining that resources had been re-allocated in order to eliminate the outstanding inspections and this in turn put pressure on other parts of the service. The Committee was informed that although there were resources available to recruit additional staff this would still not be sufficient to meet the level of inspection and enforcement demanded by the Food Standards Authority. This was a position faced by many other councils. In answer to a question from the committee, the Head of Regulatory Services confirmed that consideration was being given to different models of service delivery.

Councillor Denselow acknowledged that there was a need to get a message across to local residents in response to press headlines, that the number of outstanding inspections did not mean the borough was full of dangerous premises.

The question of how the present situation impacted on the health of local residents was raised. In response it was admitted that it was hard to measure this and no precise data existed to help identify the potential health impacts.

The Chair referred to the action plan attached as appendix A to the report and asked if there were any concerns arising from it. It was explained that where the 'Action taken to date' column was in red it tended to indicate that decisions had yet to be taken to deal with the required improvement target, rather than to any underlying issue so progress was being made on all the targets included in the plan.

RESOLVED:

that the findings of the Food Standards audit carried out in July 2014, the issues arising, response to date and the planned actions be noted.

7. Any other urgent business

None.

Items for information.

The Chair informed the meeting that Mr Iram Yaqub, a governor at Oliver Goldsmith primary school was to be appointed to the committee at the next Council meeting as a new co-opted member representing primary school governors.

The Chair informed the meeting that a system for logging key requests for information made at meetings of the committee would be brought to the next meeting.

8. Date of next meeting

Noted as 9 September 2015.

The meeting closed at 9.35 pm

D FILSON
Chair