



MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE Thursday 8 October 2015 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Filson (Chair), Councillor Colwill (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Daly, Farah, Kelcher, Stopp, Miller and Tatler, together with Ms Christine Cargill, Mr Alloysius Frederick, Mr Payam Tamiz and Iram Yaqub.

Also Present: Councillors Harrison, Pavey, Perrin and Southwood together with Maansi Luhar (Brent Youth Parliament).

Apologies were received from: Co-opted Member Dr J Levison and appointed observers Jenny Cooper, Chrissy Jolinon and Lesley Gouldbourne

1. **Declarations of interests**

None declared.

2. **Deputations**

None.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 September 2015 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. **Matters arising**

None.

5. **Data request log**

The committee noted that replies had been received to the five questions asked and Tony Kennedy (Head of Transportation) undertook to respond to the outstanding transport questions by the following day.

6. **Parking Strategy 2015**

The Lead Member, Environment, Councillor Southwood introduced the 2015 Parking Strategy and accompanying report which was due to be considered by the Cabinet at the meeting on 16 November 2015. Councillor Southwood indicated that the strategy brought together current policy to bring clarity to issues and be a reference document. The report asked for reconfirmation of the hierarchy of priorities for on-street parking, a policy for the service and the priorities going forward, particularly, Councillor Southwood reminded, given the council's current financial position. Gavin Moore (Head

of Parking and Lighting) added that many changes had been made since the 2006 Parking and Enforcement Plan and the strategy was an opportunity to identify future direction.

Members were invited to make observations on the strategy. It was suggested that the strategy could include more on changes that could be made in the future, the impact of parking restrictions on businesses and how to amend CPZs. Also raised was the impact of planning permission for developments without parking spaces in the south of the borough and the amount of income from parking enforcement. Also questioned was who was the focus of the council's vision: residents or visitors. Enforcement of traffic schemes and CPZs was also raised. A member suggested a one hour parking restriction in a specific location could stop all day commuter parking and assist emergency vehicle access. Questions were raised on parking enforcement outside schools and the need for more analysis of opening and closing times, school expansions and the need for more improved signage for parking restrictions. Members queried comparison with other local authorities and the arrangements in place to work with neighbouring boroughs on shared boundaries.

The committee agreed that the north and south of the borough experienced different problems given the shortage of off-street parking and relatively small parking spaces between houses in the south compared with the north of the borough's commuter parking problems. Concern was also expressed over parking around schools and the likelihood of accidents and the need for parking arrangements to be in place for visitors to places of worship.

The Chair drew attention to parking policies set out in the report and put forward a need for a hierarchy of on-street parking. He suggested a distinction be drawn between parking 'need' and parking 'demand', citing the example of people with disabilities who depended entirely on the use of their cars. Additionally, local businesses should be prioritised, and also essential workers and care workers should not be given a lower priority than residents.

Councillor Southwood responded that she felt the vision of the strategy to be to manage existing and future demand and promote sustainable transport as, while the rate of car ownership was falling, population levels were increasing. Additionally to identify creative ways of managing travel to and parking around schools. She also reiterated that funds were not currently available to amend existing CPZs and so a priority list should be compiled for as and when resources allowed. Regarding business priorities, Councillor Southwood felt there was need for fundamental changes and, working with businesses to develop a list of priorities. She also suggested a need for a policy review for religious and other large gatherings particularly where residents have paid for parking permits and requests were made for parking restrictions not to be enforced.

Gavin Moore (Head of Parking and Lighting) responded to the points raised by members and acknowledged the differences across the borough and the need to tailor policy accordingly. Both enforcement and support were required. He acknowledged that the economic priority of supporting retail should be extended to local employers citing the example of Park Royal where businesses were being adversely affected by commuter parking. On parking enforcement, he stated that bailiff enforcement was a last resort and that efforts were being made to improve on the bailiff contractor's current success rate and achieve faster decision making. Gavin Moore confirmed that the

Parking Strategy was a statement of the current position taking into account the Long Term Transport Strategy and local plans. He confirmed that the council did have regard for borough boundaries and also benchmarked performance and matched charging rates. In some places, other boroughs charged more and so some drivers opted to park in Brent. Gavin Moore advised that any surplus in the parking account was earmarked for concessionary fares and transport services.

Gavin Moore referred members to the Annual Parking report which was available on the council's website. He reminded the committee that CCTV could no longer be used for parking enforcement with the exception of zig zag lines and bus stops. Staff had been redeployed to streets and productivity targets continued to be met. This loss of powers had disadvantaged schools and shopping areas. CCTV could still be used for moving traffic violations and the aim was to place them carefully and seek to change behaviour. Positioning outside schools would be revisited. The productivity target was for efficiency of activity not the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued and efforts were made to ensure the aim of increasing efficiency and improving traffic flow. Specifically regarding parking outside schools the need was for appropriately designed restrictions, persuasion with travel plans and parental behaviour and finally targeted enforcement. Councillor Southwood agreed on the need to raise the profile of the rules governing school parking.

The committee then went on to ask questions about the problems in imposing one hour parking restrictions to deter all day commuter parking and the use of wardens to change parents anti social parking behaviour. The needs of those attending centres for disabilities and special needs was also highlighted alongside the impact of CO₂ emissions which one member felt that a one hour parking restriction in a particular area would help alleviate. Views were expressed in support of children being encouraged to walk to school and parking charges being reduced to encourage shoppers into the borough. Increased development of car parks was suggested. Questions were also raised on modern camera technology and whether efforts had been made to generate income. The view was also put that the Strategy should be less optimistic in tone so as to manage expectations, given the council's financial position. Tony Kennedy responded that in the absence of a CPZ budget, Section 106 and Local Improvement Plan (LIP) funds were used where possible. Good practice was to review after one year and he agreed specific areas could be targeted for enforcement. Gavin Moore confirmed that revenue opportunities were being taken into account when considering off-street parking provision. In response to a suggestion for penalty charges to be increased Gavin Moore reminded the committee that these were set London wide and could not be varied. He advised that targets were being set for parking and traffic PCN collection rates which he hoped would improve. Members heard that car park usage was being expanded and cashless arrangements, away from residential areas investigated. Consideration was also needed to prevent shop owners and staff from parking in shopping bays.

The following data requests were made:

- the amount of parking enforcement money collected by bailiffs
- the number of fatalities and injuries
- the extent to which the new parking contract has helped to achieve improvement targets.

RESOLVED:

that the 2015 Parking Strategy be noted and comments forwarded to the Cabinet for their consideration at the meeting on 16 November 2015.

7. **Complaints Annual Report 2014-15**

The report before the Scrutiny Committee provided an overview of corporate complaints received by the council during the period April 2014 to March 2015.

Councillor Pavey (Deputy Leader) in introducing the report emphasised the importance of complaints as a feedback opportunity and responsiveness indicator and felt the report would benefit from the inclusion of more case studies to demonstrate the human side. He was pleased to report consistent improvement in the speed of resolution with a high percentage resolved within 20 days. Councillor Pavey regretted the number of complaints about staff and customer services and drew attention to the list of planned improvements. Cathy Tyson (Head of Policy and Scrutiny) outlined the investigation process which aimed to seek remedy rapidly and was pleased to report that in the final quarter, 100% had been resolved within the target deadline. Cathy Tyson acknowledged concern about poor customer service, the need for clear correspondence and action plans were being compiled together with a corporate programme to reinforce standards.

The Chair expressed concern at the relatively high number of complaints fully or partly upheld at first stage and also at final stage and requested more information on cases where maladministration had been found, to aid understanding. Members questioned the possible reasons behind findings of poor customer care, the extent to which it was attributable to a lack of training or low staff morale and whether there were patterns between services. Members also questioned the response times and heard that most were resolvable within the 20 days target and questioned whether straightforward cases where the council was at fault were accepted and apologies issued at an early stage. Members requested justification for the view expressed in the report that customers resorted to the complaints process as a means of having a negative decision reviewed. They also questioned what action was being taken to compensate cases where homeless families have been kept in bed and breakfast accommodation longer than the maximum six weeks. Concern was also expressed at complaints over Veolia staff behaviour suggesting the need for independent audit. Members agreed on the need for improved communication with the public.

Councillor Pavey expressed a preference for fewer number of complaints but with a higher number upheld and Cathy Tyson added that the complaints where it had been found that policy and procedure had not been properly explained were avoidable. Councillor Pavey also questioned how it was possible to accurately benchmark complaints when they came in a variety of forms. Cathy Tyson advised that the council took part in London wide comparisons and reminded the committee that the Complaints Team was small, with no staff based in departments allowing for a corporate grip on the numbers.

Concern was also expressed at the length of time taken to complete repairs and questioned why this was the case especially for urgent cases involving residents' safety. They suggested that staff should be more empathetic and less judgemental of complainants. Additionally, it was put that there was a democratic deficiency with many

residents not aware of the role of the council. A change in terminology from customers to residents was suggested to help bring about an attitudinal change.

Councillor Pavey acknowledged that a lot of work was required beyond the scope of the report involving the whole workforce, not forgetting hard to reach groups who had not complained. Cathy Tyson advised that the use of the investigation standard was stressed to lead to a better standard of outcome. Encouraging more complaints and using comment cards would also assist, with the vulnerable helped by advocates. It was recognised that the compensation level at stage 1 should be higher and action was being taken to address this.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the council's performance in managing and resolving complaints be noted;
- (ii) that the actions being taken to improve response times to complaints and reduce the number of complaints which escalate to the final review stage be noted;
- (iii) that a progress report be submitted in six months' time.

8. **Fly Tipping task group scope**

The Committee considered the proposed scope for the Scrutiny task group on Fly Tipping in Brent. This task group has been requested by the Scrutiny members in response to communicated concerns from Brent residents.

RESOLVED:

that the scope be noted.

9. **Scrutiny key comments, recommendations and actions**

The Committee received the log of key comments, recommendations and actions. Members noted that school admissions was listed as a proposed task group however were reminded that the process was bound by statute and the availability of places locally and in neighbouring boroughs. Councillor Pavey advised that most children had been offered school places but it been a difficult process. The school expansion programme had gone well however the additional students would in time be placing demands on secondary schools.

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm

D FILSON
Chair