



MINUTES OF THE PARTNERSHIP AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 24 February 2011 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Van Kalwala (Chair), and Councillors Hirani, Naheerathan, HB Patel and S Choudhary

Apologies were received from: Councillors Clues and A Choudry

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Order of Business

RESOLVED: -

That the order of business be amended to as set out below:

- Deputations
- Minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 December 2010
- Matters arising
- London Fire Brigade Brent - overview and partnership working
- Impact of budget changes on policing and crime prevention in Brent
- Partners for Brent - Partnership achievements 2010/11
- Date of next meeting
- Any other urgent business

3. Deputations

None received.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 December 2010

RESOLVED: -

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 December 2011 be approved as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

- that the last sentence of the second paragraph of minute number 4 be amended to read 'Councillor Hirani stressed the importance of voluntary organisations in achieving the outcomes set'.

5. Matters arising

Voluntary Sector Resource Centre

An update was requested on the progress achieved with regard to the Voluntary Sector Resource Centre. Joanna McCormick (Partnerships Coordinator, Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) advised that the council would support the Resource Centre and was waiting for a suitable Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) to be established in order for the joint partnership project to progress. Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director – Policy) further explained that the project was successful in obtaining BIG Lottery funding to progress the development of a centre but that this was being held in trust until a CVS was in place. In response to a query, Joanna McCormick confirmed that an appropriate site for the Centre was yet to be identified.

Re-offenders in Brent

With reference to item 6, a Member noted that 83% of offenders in the borough had re-offended and sought further information with respect to the causes of this. Genny Renard (Head of Integrated Community Safety – Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) advised that a multitude of reasons could be attributed to this trend including the influence of habitual lifestyles, issues relating to the process of settling back into society, including difficulties gaining employment and housing, and that for those sentenced to less than 12 months imprisonment, no probation support was provided. The council was working with its partners to operate/facilitate various support projects such as those aimed at supporting individuals struggling with drug or alcohol abuse. An example of such a project was the Saturday Club which was run by ex abusers and aimed to help those offenders released on a Friday for whom there was no official support scheduled until the following Monday. The committee was further advised that a disproportionate impact on the figures of a few prolific offenders was evident. In response to this, tight controls were operated with such offenders and compliance with statutory obligations demanded such as probationary visits and drugs testing. In addition work was conducted across a range of services, including children and family services, health services and the police, to target support and interventions at the families of such individuals. It was noted that funding issues might impact the delivery of such work in the future.

6. London Fire Brigade Brent - overview and partnership working

Sean Bennet (Borough Commander Brent – London Fire Brigade) delivered a presentation to the Committee outlining the key objectives and areas of work of the Fire Brigade in Brent, including aspects of its collaborative/partnership working. The objectives of the service reflected a shift in emphasis from a reactive to a proactive service, with a focus on prevention and education. In line with this, a number of services could be accessed free of charge, including advice via the telephone and internet, and the provision and fitting of fire alarms on request. Further preventative actions, including home visits, were targeted at those deemed most vulnerable including elderly people, those with disabilities, drug and alcohol abusers and those with English as a second language. Information sharing with partner organisations had enabled the fire brigade to develop a holistic approach to the identification of vulnerable groups and areas. For example, a broad correlation existed between areas of deprivation, levels of crime and incidences of fire and data from the Police was therefore used to ascertain those areas at greater risk from fire. The service also collaborated with partner agencies to achieve more comprehensive interventions. In tackling the use of a derelict building by a number of homeless

individuals for example, the fire brigade had worked with several organisations including the police and health service to ensure that the different needs of the individuals were met and a longer-term result achieved.

During members' discussion, the Chair requested that the Borough Commander – Brent, outline any upcoming issues for the Fire Brigade in Brent. The meeting was advised that ongoing issues included; continuing to educate the public in relation to fire safety, improving information sharing between partner organisations and the identification of at risk individuals. Councillor Hirani queried how the Fire Brigade would be affected by budgetary cuts and was informed that line services would not be affected and efficiency savings would be made in relation to back office staff and at management levels, with for example, it being likely that the Borough Commander posts become merged to cover several boroughs. It was further explained that a service wide review was conducted every five years and where working practices could be improved appropriate action would be taken. Members were advised that currently uniformed officers carried out a range of general day-to-day functions which could be completed by other members of staff to free up officer time where required. It was confirmed that in the event of Trade Union strikes or other disruptions, alternative means of cover were required to be provided and appropriate procedures were in place. Previously a private agency had been engaged to provide cover and in such circumstances short term preventative work would be reduced.

Councillor S Choudhary sought clarification as to what constituted a front line function. Sean Bennet noted that the distinction was not definite as the preventative work of the fire brigade was essential to reducing the number of fires. However, the committee heard that a charge was now made for any non-essential work carried out including, for example, where assistance was provided to individuals trapped in malfunctioning lifts. In such circumstances the landlord was held responsible for the charge.

The Chair sought information regarding outreach for those with English as a second language. The meeting was advised that publications with generic advice were provided in a variety of languages, alongside wholly visual guides. Follow up services could also be provided if it was thought necessary and it was noted that the Fire Brigade had developed good links with Brent Multi-Faith Forum.

The Chair noted that in the difficult economic climate, homelessness was likely to rise and queried how this would be addressed by the Fire Service. The committee was informed that a risk assessment would be conducted for those premises thought likely to be used by homeless people and action would be taken as necessary. A supportive but hard-line approach would be followed, in line with neighbouring boroughs, to encourage people to engage with the relevant services. In response to a query, Sean Bennet confirmed that whilst it was difficult to quantify the impact of some preventative actions, significant reductions had consistently been achieved against service targets both with respect to domestic and intentional fires.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation by the Borough Commander Brent – London Fire Brigade be noted.

7. Impact of budget changes on policing and crime prevention in Brent

Genny Renard (Head of Integrated Community Safety – Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) introduced a report to the Committee outlining the development of the Community Safety Unit and detailing the impact of the reduction in funding on the Crime Prevention Strategy Group (CPSG) and the partnership work delivered in Brent. Through the CPSG, the Brent Community Safety Partnership Unit (BCSPU) worked with council departments, the police and other key partners and agencies to tackle crime and disorder in Brent. This was a statutory requirement set out in the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998.

Genny Renard advised that the work of the BCSPU had been adversely affected during the financial year 2010/11, with the withdrawal by central government of just over £135k of funding. The mid-year cuts to funding had principally affected the unit's work around domestic violence. For the forthcoming financial year it was expected that demand on community safety services would rise. Funding for 2011/12 would be greatly reduced due to the abolition of ring-fenced grants and all of the agencies with which BCSPU and CPSG worked would also experience pressures resulting from reduced funding. The need to meet changing demands with fewer resources had prompted research into how best to deliver community safety functions within the current climate. Strengthened and improved partnership working had resulted from such efforts, allowing available funding to be used effectively. However, inevitably, some areas of work would no longer be delivered. It was highlighted that there would be a renewed focus on risk to ensure that work was centred on vulnerable individuals and groups within the community and there would be greater emphasis on preventative work.

Genny Renard confirmed that local authority funding for additional police officers had been reduced, although internal negotiations were currently being held to seek alternative funding options. It was noted that the Mayor of London was currently operating a 'buy one get one free' scheme by which the cost of police constables and community support officers was significantly subsidised; however it was unclear as to whether the council would be able to take advantage of the offer.

Alisdair Ferguson (Superintendent – Partnerships, Metropolitan police) advised that the police Commissioner and Borough Commander had committed to maintaining front line services. Substantial savings had been made through the centralisation of support services and recruitment was currently frozen. The latter of these actions would eventually result in a loss of PCSOs via promotion and outside recruitment. The Committee was informed that currently the Brent policing area had five fewer PCSOs and ten to fifteen fewer PCs than intended. As a result of this there was currently an embargo on transfers out of the borough, although Area Commanders would liaise to ensure that there was an appropriate balance of officers across London. The Borough command unit fund of £300k had been withdrawn and this had financed local partnership posts and operations. Genny Renard further advised that the local authority had in previous years allocated contingency funding to be used for police operations in response to sudden increases in crime and that such responses in the future would be far slower due to the need to reallocate funds dedicated elsewhere. Alisdair Ferguson further confirmed a preventative approach would become increasingly important and in response to a query, noted that changes in officer behaviours to reflect this new focus, would be encouraged via

effective leadership and the setting and maintaining of clear standards. Members were advised that public complaints relating to civility had reduced by circa fifteen to twenty percent. The possibility of delivering joint training sessions between the council and police was currently being explored.

During members discussion further details were sought regarding the progress made in relation to the new staffing structure for the Community Safety unit. The Committee was advised that a staff consultation had been conducted and a final decision would be reached by 4 March 2011. No negative feedback regarding the proposed structure had been received thus far. Under the new structure, generic job descriptions would be utilised to encourage the development of a flexible work force.

Several queries were raised in relation to the table set out in the report detailing the funding of specific projects or positions, both pre and post the cuts to the Area Based Grant (ABG). Genny Renard explained that due to the mid-year ABG cuts, the unit had been required to find £135k of savings from monies committed to works already commissioned. Therefore, the contractual arrangements for these works and the desire to avoid redundancies had been a key consideration in making the necessary savings. With regard to the Kickz project, members were advised that funding would be a particular issue and that work would be carried out with voluntary sector partners to help source alternative funding. Alisdair Ferguson highlighted that this was a very successful project which helped to keep young people engaged in positive activities. A member queried how ward-level information on crime could be accessed by Councillors and was advised that this information was available via the internet. It was agreed that a link to the relevant website and accompanying instructions would be circulated.

Further information was sought as to how the changes which had been described to the Committee would be communicated to the public. Genny Renard advised that two borough wide consultations were held per year and that information would also be disseminated via links with Ward Safer Panels and Neighbourhood Panels.

The Chair made reference to the recommendation set out at paragraph 2.3 of the report, that a small set of key performance indicators (PI) be selected for monitoring by the Committee and invited the Head of Integrated Community Safety – Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement to make any suggestions or further comments as necessary. Genny Renard provided a number of examples of possible PIs including community satisfaction and anti-social behaviour and noted that data for the former was already gathered by the police. Having considered this, it was agreed that the possible PI options be drafted and submitted to the Committee at a future meeting for further examination.

The Committee requested an update on the consultation on the Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs). The meeting heard that the review had now closed and a decision was expected in April. Key outcomes of the review included that communities wanted consistency in their SNTs across borders. It was felt that flexibility of resources was central to the working of SNTs to enable action to take place as necessary. In terms of uniformed presence per ward, the numbers were yet to be confirmed.

With reference to the table at paragraph 3.29 outlining the funding situation for the forthcoming financial year, the Chair sought further information on the Borough

Command Unit Fund. Alisdair advised that the £72k indicated for 2011/12 had now been directed to the Mayor of London to contribute towards security for the Olympics and also the 'buy one get one free' scheme for PCs and PCSOs. The borough had previously funded seventeen additional PCSOs but would not for 2011/12. Genny Renard further advised that there were many changes still in process with regard to the funding situation for 2011/12. The Committee heard that some areas of work would no longer require funding as detailed for 2010/11. For instance the post of coordinator for guns, gangs and knife crime had now been deleted as its functions would now be covered via the youth offending team. Other related projects funded previously had been part of discrete pieces of work, such as the 'Not Another Drop' project which had been supported through a transition to an independent company.

A concern was raised that it had been reported that Domestic Violence was expected to rise and yet much of the BCSUs related work had been adversely affected. Genny Renard explained that the BCSU was working with community and voluntary groups to advance work around Domestic Violence and Victim Support. The Council had contributed to several bids for funding for these organisations, the outcomes of which were as yet unknown. A guidance document around anti-social behaviour, setting out the statutory obligations for landlords was also in development and this included reference to Domestic Violence.

RESOLVED: -

- (i) that the report and updates provided by the Head of Integrated Community Safety – Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement and Superintendent – Partnerships, Metropolitan police be noted
- (ii) that updates regarding the satisfaction survey conducted for the police be submitted to Committee regularly; and
- (iii) that a small set of key performance indicators be selected for crime and Anti Social Behaviour for monitoring by the committee.

8. **Partners for Brent - Partnership achievements 2010/11**

Joanna McCormick (Partnerships Coordinator, Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) outlined a report to the Committee, setting out the highlights from partnership projects in 2010/11. A new approach to partnership working had been employed by the borough, with a view to consolidating existing partnership working and prioritising successful practices. The new approach involved the separation of the focus on engagement with strategic issues from the focus on practical delivery of projects through a restructuring of partnership activity. One of the key achievements highlighted to members was the production of a high quality analysis of the state of the borough. This analysis drew on a range of statistics to enhance the evidence base for Brent's partnership strategies and aided the development of the Community Plan – 'Brent – Our Future' which detailed the priorities for the years ahead. A set of partnership groups, 'Partners for Brent', had worked to deliver projects to achieve the outcomes set out in the Community Plan. Members were advised that 2010/11 also saw the launch of the Cultural Strategy and the Climate Change Strategy and the Regeneration Strategy. Other key highlights for 2010/11

touched upon a wide range of different areas including crime, health, children and families, sustainability and culture.

Joanna McCormick highlighted the fact that the changing financial context would undoubtedly impact upon partnership working and that partners would need to make better use of existing resources and have a more detailed understanding of the impact of actions on other organisations in the borough, with an overriding focus on the overall provision of services to residents. However, 2010/11 had seen the formulation of enhanced governance arrangements for Brent's partnership group and in planning for 2011/12, partners had agreed to several unified actions. These included, a thematic approach to partnership projects to deliver the Community Plan, the establishment of further formal partnership principles, the development of an intelligence hub, making intelligent use of staff and looking at options for sharing assets and procuring together.

During members' discussion, several queries were raised in relation to a variety of community issues. With reference to the practices of chewing of Paan and Khat in particular communities, a query was raised regarding the level of punitive action taken against individuals caught spitting. It was acknowledged that this was an important issue with which the council and its partners had to engage and Joanna McCormick advised that Paan related campaigns had been run via ward working. Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director- Policy) further noted a piece of work would be required to educate people in relation to the different negative effects of chewing Paan and Khat and to raise awareness's of the public health consequences of the related habit of spitting. Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) could issue fixed penalty notices to those caught spitting, however this clearly relied on the presence of those officers.

A member noted that due to cultural barriers some Asian women might fail to engage with health services through their GP and noted that actions should be taken to mitigate this. Joanna McCormick advised that the PCT had previously completed a lot of work to raise awareness of the accessibility of the health services and this had been very successful. It was agreed that this issue would be raised with the appropriate organisations. Cathy Tyson also noted that women could often be encouraged to engage with health services through their children and that the PCT had been very successful in doing so via their immunisation programmes. A further query was raised regarding work around forced marriages and the committee was advised that raising awareness had formed a part of some of the council's diversity team campaigns and the issue is covered in the violence against women and girls strategy presently being put together by partners on the Crime Prevention Strategy Group.

The Chair noted that it was reported that the achievement of children and young people from low income families and those with special educational needs (SEN) had improved but queried why this was not reflected in the LAA performance indicator. Joanna McCormick advised that the improvement was evident in relation to young people from deprived backgrounds, but the LAA indicators reported at previous meetings related specifically to the timeframes for completing assessments for all SEN assessments rather than the educational attainment of SEN pupils. Performance Indicators for Quarter 3 would be available at the next meeting of the Committee. Cathy Tyson advised that Brent performance was ahead

of the national and regional average with regard to SEN achievement of 5 A* - C GCSEs including English and Maths.

RESOLVED: -

that the report be noted.

9. **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting, scheduled for Tuesday, 5 April 2011, was noted.

10. **Any other urgent business**

None.

The meeting closed at 9.37 pm

Z Van Kalwala
Chair