



Brent

MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES AND PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday 11 July 2017 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Kelcher (Chair), Councillor Davidson (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Aden, Colacicco, Crane, Ezeajughi, Harrison (Substituting for Councillor Stopp) and Kabir (Substituting for Councillor Mashari)

Also Present: Councillor McLennan

Apologies were received from: Councillors Mashari and Stopp

1. **Declarations of interests**

For purposes of transparency, Councillor Crane informed the committee that he was a Director of Investing 4 Brent (I4B).

2. **Deputations (if any)**

None received.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 May 2017 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

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

Councillor Kabir referred to the discussion on the Safer Brent Partnership Annual Report and Update on Community Safety item and queried whether officers had been referred to the Schools Partnership Board. The Chair summarised the reasoning for the recommendation made and clarified that the committee had not prescribed to officers the means of implementing the recommendation.

5. **The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee 2017-18 Work Programme**

The Chair introduced the report on the committee work programme for 2017/18 and detailed the strategic approach taken in developing the programme. The meeting was informed that committee members, Lead members and Directors were all invited to pitch ideas for scrutiny for the forthcoming year, these were then judged against criteria developed to reflect the principles of effective scrutiny. The resulting work programme covered a broad range of items and policy areas across corporate resources, regeneration and environment, transport and community safety and extended beyond the council to include a submission from the Department for Work and Pensions. Recognising the significance of the council's

Digital Strategy, many of the reports to be presented to the committee would also include comment on the Digital element.

A number of minor amendments to be made to the programme set out in the papers before the committee were highlighted by the Chair.

In the subsequent discussion, it was noted that a report on Outcome Based Reviews (OBRs) was due to be submitted to the committee at its next meeting and officers were directed to review what consideration was given to past Task Group reports by those undertaking the OBRs. The Chair also clarified to the committee that any members wishing to be involved in proposed Task Groups should indicate their interest to the Chair and Scrutiny Officers.

RESOLVED:

- i) that the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2017-2018 be agreed subject to the following amendments:
 - a. Councillor Miller (Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities) should be the Cabinet Member against item 4, 'Trading Standards' for the meeting of 9 January 2018.
 - b. Councillor Butt (Leader of the Council) should be the Cabinet member against item 2, 'Property and assets' for the meeting of 21 February 2018.
- ii) that the task group reports on gangs and domestic violence be circulated to the committee for review prior to the next meeting of the committee at which a report on Outcome Based Reviews would be considered;
- iii) that the report from the Director of Performance, Policy and Partnerships, presenting the committee's annual work programme be agreed.

6. 2016-17 Annual Scrutiny Report

The committee considered the Annual Scrutiny report for 2016-2017. The report summarised the work conducted by the Scrutiny function throughout the year, including Task Group work and questions and decisions made by both the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee and the Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee. The report also provided an overview of Call-ins dealt with by the committees under Standing Order 20 and summarised committee engagement with the public and wider networks.

Reflecting on the report, Members noted that site visits undertaken by the committee during this period had been extremely valuable and had enhanced the committee's ability to scrutinise the issues presented. Members further commented that the report should contain an appraisal of the impact of the committee's work, to underline the importance of the scrutiny function and support further improvement. The committee agreed to incorporate the changes discussed in future reports and the Chair advised that he would include these in his report to full Council. Members further directed that the report should be shared in the Members' Bulletin to ensure

that all Councillors were encouraged to view the document. In concluding the discussion, the committee expressed its thanks to all the officers who had supported the committees work in 2016-2017.

RESOLVED:

- i) that the 2016-17 Annual Scrutiny Report be agreed;
- ii) that the 2016-17 Annual Scrutiny Report be included in the Members' Bulletin.

7. Strategic Overview of the Council's Funding

Andrew Ward (Head of Finance) delivered a presentation to the committee outlining the council's funding position, highlighting key risks and obligations, and noting the current level of uncertainty resulting from the absence of the Local Government Finance Bill from the Queen's Speech on 21 June 2017. The main sources of local government funding were set out and the year on year reduction of local government core funding was illustrated to the committee. Noting the legal budgeting responsibilities of the council, Andrew Ward reminded members that balanced budget had been set for 2017/18 and proposals had been agreed in February 2017 detailing how a balanced budget for 2018/19 would be achieved. These proposals included a council tax increase of 4 per cent, procurement savings of £4.5m and additional income of £1.25m generated through civic enterprise. A budget gap of circa £13m remained to be bridged for 2019/20. In concluding the presentation, Andrew Ward outlined a number of key developments in local government finance including: business rates devolution and the potential to join a London pool if devolution of the rates was to proceed; school funding and the national funding formula; Adult Social Care and NHS integration; and, the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader of the Council) emphasised that the Local Government Association had undertaken a peer review of Brent's budgetary management and had concluded that the way the council was progressing was good. As the situation regarding the Local Government Finance Bill and devolution of business rates was still evolving, the committee would be updated as soon as clarity was obtained.

In the subsequent discussion, the committee questioned how the council was responding to the current uncertainty. Clarity was sought regarding the reported figure of £4.5m procurement savings and the challenges that this target had presented. Further comment was sought on the £1.25m income to be generated via civic enterprise. It was queried how the council would capitalise on the increased use of Wembley Stadium and particularly, what the revenue benefit was for the council of the use of Wembley Stadium by Tottenham Hotspurs. Questions were raised regarding the anticipated level of revenue from the in-house litter enforcement team, whether this could be maximised by a more aggressive deployment of the team and how this had been accounted for in the budgeting process. The committee questioned what work had been undertaken to identify how the council would meet the £13m funding gap for 2019/2020. A member highlighted the need to safeguard pensions and meet any percentage increase in staff pay and questioned how prepared the council was to meet these eventualities. Members

sought information on Brent's comparative position to other local authorities with regard to per capita cost of services and business rates generated in the borough.

Responding to the queries raised, Andrew Ward advised that officers were monitoring the position regarding the Local Government Funding Bill and clarified that the procurement savings of £4.5m were for the financial year 2017/2018, with further savings to follow in the subsequent year. Althea Loderick explained that the procurement savings sometimes exceeded or fell below the target of 10 per cent per contract but the overall deficit was proportionately redistributed across departmental budgets. Discussing income generated via civic enterprise, Althea Loderick (Strategic Director Resources) emphasised that this would provide a yearly contribution of £1.25m to the council's budget. There had been a shortfall against this target in the first year of operation and lessons had been learned during this period. More sophisticated market modelling had been undertaken by the council with regard to fees and charges. This had underlined that increasing fees did not always lead to increased income due to the impact on demand. There was also a heightened focus on the council's strengths, such as delivery of digital services and maximising use of the Civic Centre. The opportunity to market the Civic Centre as a venue for tie-in events for larger Arena or Stadium events was recognised and would be pursued by the new Head of Conference and Events. The projected income for the uniformed litter patrol team had been accounted for within the budget for the Regeneration and Environment department. The Chair highlighted that the committee would receive an update on the working of this new team at its next meeting in September.

Althea Loderick assured the committee that the council's pension contributions were sufficient and were based upon regular actuarial reviews. The council was also planning for a potential increase of staff salaries beyond the current 1 per cent cap.

During the discussion, officers advised that the following information was not available to share at the current meeting but could be circulated subsequently: an assessment of the revenue benefit and any costs incurred for Brent Council as a result of Tottenham Hotspurs use of Wembley Stadium; a comparative analysis of income from Business Rates across London's 33 boroughs; and, details of the CIPFA analysis of spend on services per capita for Brent if available.

The committee thanked officers for their contribution to the meeting.

8. Proposed Scope for Scrutiny Task Group on the use of Food Banks in Brent

The Chair introduced the report setting out the proposed scope for the Scrutiny task group on the use of food banks in Brent. The task group had been requested by members following a noticeable increase in the usage of food banks, both in Brent and nationally. It was proposed that the task group would look at Brent, London and the national picture, with a focus on understanding the issue and the current position of central government, local authorities and other public sector partners. Specifically, the task group would analyse four key areas: understanding the drivers and scale of the problem; policy and practice; the experience of the resident; and, public perception. Members' attention was drawn to Appendices A and B to the report detailing in full the proposed scope and terms of reference for the task group respectively.

In the subsequent discussion, members agreed that a visit be conducted by the task group to a food bank as part of the research undertaken and questioned how the conclusions of the task group would be taken forward by the council. The Chair emphasised that currently there was no legislation around this issue, nor any formal council policy in place. There was an opportunity to ensure that the council was at the forefront of responding to this issue, reflecting on partnership working and providing a clear steer locally. The councils referred to in the report as providing good examples had established food network partnerships. A member highlighted the supplementary role played by some voluntary or religious organisations in providing meals and noted that these may not fall within the definition of a food bank. The Chair advised that these groups would fall within the scope of the task group.

RESOLVED: that the scope, terms of reference and time scale for the task group on the Use of Food Banks in Brent, attached at appendices A and B to the report from the Director of Performance, Policy and Partnerships, be agreed.

9. Any other urgent business

None.

10. Date of next meeting

The committee noted that the next meeting would be held on 5 September 2017.

The meeting closed at 8.28 pm

M KELCHER
Chair