



## Full Council

9 July 2018

### Report from the Director of Performance Policy & Partnerships

## Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee - Chair's Update Report

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	None
<b>Background Papers:</b>	N/A
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Patrick Doherty, Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Patrick.doherty@brent.gov.uk

### 1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report provides a summary of the work carried out by the Council's Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee in accordance with Standing Order 14. The report covers the period from 29 January 2018 to present.

### 2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 Council is recommended to note this report.

### 3.0 Detail

3.1 The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee covers corporate resources, (including Customer Services, Policy, Partnerships and Performance, Procurement and IT) as well as regeneration, regulatory services, environment, transport and community safety. The committee is comprised of eight elected members (seven from the Labour Group and one opposition group member which is consistent with current political balance arrangements).

3.2 *2017-18 Resources and Public Realm Committee Members*

Councillor Matt Kelcher (Chair)  
Councillor Joel Davidson (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Abdi Aden  
Councillor Lia Colacicco  
Councillor George Crane  
Councillor Ernest Ezeajughi  
Councillor Sam Stopp  
Councillor Roxanne Mashari.

- 3.3 The committee has met three times since the last report to Council, in February 2018, March 2018 and on 3 July 2018. The January 2018 meeting had fallen after reporting deadlines to Council, so that meeting is also covered in this report. Similarly, the July 2018 meeting fell after the deadline for this report to Council, so that meeting will now be covered in a future report.
- 3.4 In **January**, the committee received the report of the budget scrutiny task group. This year's task group was formed at the halfway point of a two-year budget. As a result, it undertook budget scrutiny in a slightly different way than in previous years. This included focusing on specific policies where it had concerns, rather than reviewing all spending plans (which last year's task group had already examined), as part of its legal duty to scrutinise the budget. Alongside this, the task group also looked at the impact of the plan to pool business rates across the London boroughs.
- 3.5 The task group was comprised of members from the three scrutiny committees and chaired by the Chair of the Resources and Public Realm Committee. It met three times, including a session attended by the Leader and Deputy Leader, to discuss the proposed pilot for pooled business rates in London. Relevant members of the Cabinet and senior officers also attended to inform discussions of the progress against savings proposals from the existing budget. It was further advised by experts from London Councils, the Local Government Association, and the Department for Communities and Local Government.
- 3.6 The task group made 12 individual recommendations, which were reported to Cabinet and Council as part of the consideration and passing of the budget.
- 3.7 The committee received an overview of the Digital Strategy, approved by Cabinet in June 2017, and also an outline of the proposed Channel Strategy currently in development. In the subsequent discussion members questioned whether the council had undertaken appropriate research and queried whether the website could be accessed in different languages. Questions were also raised regarding response times with regard to emails and how to manage public expectations.
- 3.8 Members expressed support for the Harlesden Community Hub model, but noted that issues had been raised regarding uniformity and quality of service due to the range of different partners contributing to its delivery. They were therefore concerned to ensure these were being monitored and addressed. Members also asked about contingencies should the council's IT infrastructure

fail, and queried what the council could do to expand the provision of high-speed broadband in the borough.

- 3.9 Members reviewed recycling rates in Brent, with the Lead Member for Environment highlighting the challenge to the council in sustainably maintaining recycling rates against an increasing proportion of flats in the borough.
- 3.10 Members sought clarity on trends in bulky waste requests and the use of the Abbey Road Brent Reuse and Recycling Centre site since the bulky waste charge was introduced. Members questioned if the council was being bold enough in its recycling targets and asked what strategy was in place to address the issues with recycling in flats. There was also discussion on whether Brent was able to increase charges for trade waste and on how to better educate Brent's residents regarding the free of charge services, to address illegal dumping. The committee asked that the Lead Member ensure that the promotion of the council's recycling app is maximised.
- 3.11 The committee received a report reviewing Trading Standards' role and priority areas as the budget for the service had reduced significantly in recent years, whilst demand had continued to increase.
- 3.12 In questioning and discussion, the committee placed great emphasis on potential for invest-to-save opportunities for the service and the need for a commitment to protecting Brent's vulnerable residents. Specific questions were asked regarding the service's scope to take enforcement action against ticket touts and whether it worked with the voluntary sector to raise awareness around fraud and scams, with the proliferation of online scams being noted. Questions were also asked on how Trading Standards had evolved to respond to this trend. Discussing the rising number of acid attack incidents across the country, members questioned how the service worked with Brent traders regarding the sale of chemicals used in such assaults.
- 3.13 In **February**, the District Operations Manager for the Department for Work and Pensions presented a report on employment and employability in Brent, outlining the proposals to close the Willesden and Kilburn Job Centres and merge them with existing sites in Wembley and Harlesden.
- 3.14 The committee questioned the purpose of the closures and sought to understand if cost or service redesign was the dominant factor. The committee also queried how accessible the online consultation process had been for vulnerable groups accessing services at the affected job centres.
- 3.15 Members sought clarity regarding the scrutiny mechanisms in place for the DWP and questioned whether the DWP would be open to more local scrutiny and information sharing with Brent Council. The Chair of the Task Group on Food Banks sought commitment from the DWP to exploring and progressing the recommendations of the task group report.
- 3.16 Members considered a report on Wembley regeneration, which provided an overarching view of the work and development being undertaken in Wembley.

They asked questions on Quintain's business model for its Wembley Park development; the replacing of the pedestrian way (pedway) between Wembley Park underground station and Wembley Stadium; the community benefits being delivered by the Wembley Park regeneration; and the extent to which the new developments met the council's planning guidance.

- 3.17 Officers from the Property service provided a general introduction to the council's property and assets for the committee, who questioned whether these were being maximised for the council's civic enterprise agenda, including being used as advertising space, and how they were being used to meet the council's strategic objectives.
- 3.18 Members further queried whether the council had a strategy for identifying sites from within its own portfolio that would be suitable for development over the next few years. Clarification was sought regarding the financial arrangements with academy schools on council owned land. There was some concern that the council was not able to use its existing property portfolio in an innovative manner to address issues of urgent need in the borough; and the committee expressed its desire to scrutinise the planned revision of the council's Assets Strategy prior to its submission to Cabinet for approval.
- 3.19 In **March**, the committee received the Safer Brent Partnership Annual Report and update on Community Safety, welcoming the Deputy Borough Commander from the Metropolitan Police, and the Chief Executive (as chair of the Safer Brent Partnership), as well as the Lead Member for Stronger Communities and other key council officers.
- 3.20 Members questioned whether a reduction in resources was impacting any performance measurements in the report and also whether any reduction in community policing was having an impact on intelligence gathering. Questions were also asked about street grooming and what was being done to ensure this was not occurring in Brent; as well as approaches to tackling prostitution, gang activity, drug use and the notion of designing out crime in the public realm.
- 3.21 The committee received an update report on the actions taken to respond to the recommendations set out in the April 2017 Task Group Report on Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, as well as wider activity developed across the council to support the business growth and enterprise agenda. The Chair questioned the response to the task group recommendation regarding the appointment of a business champion for SMEs, and advised that for future update reports it would be helpful to provide an explanation of the reasons for alternative courses of action being taken, where these diverged significantly from the recommendations made.
- 3.23 The committee sought further information on the transparency of the Business Board and queries were raised regarding the integration of the Board with the council and the availability of the minutes of the Board's meetings for Members to view. The committee questioned how the council could further develop its employment support offer and proposed that members be apprised of the resources available to enable them to better signpost residents.

3.24 The committee received a presentation from the Partnerships and Engagement Manager on the community engagement review currently underway. The committee expressed enthusiasm for a collaborative approach to engagement and advised that it was eager to support the council in its efforts to promote meaningful engagement.

3.25 Members questioned how residents would be encouraged to participate in this approach and also queried whether any external organisations with expertise in consultation would be engaged as part of the review. Further queries were raised regarding existing stakeholder management practice and how this interacted with the consultation strategy; funds available to support residents to engage with the council and community activities; and how the council's presence on social media was monitored. Further details were also sought about the model used for the Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum.

#### **4.0 Scrutiny Meetings and Activities**

4.1 The meeting of the committee on 03 July 2018 will be covered in the next report to Council. The items it considered were:

- An update on the draft Assets Strategy
- An update on priorities for the in-development Borough Plan
- Revised terms of reference for the affordable housing task group

#### **5.0 Financial Implications**

5.1 There are no financial implications.

#### **6.0 Legal Implications**

6.1 There are no legal implications.

#### **7.0 Equality Implications**

7.1 There are no equality implications.

**Report sign off:**

***Peter Gadsdon***

Director of Performance Policy &  
Partnerships