

MINUTES OF THE FORWARD PLAN SELECT COMMITTEE
Thursday, 24th September, 2009 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Castle (Vice Chair in the Chair) and Councillors Farrell (for Councillor Long), V Brown, Powney, Tancred, Castle, Farrell and Steel (for Councillor Mistry)

Also Present: Councillor Van Colle

Apologies were received from: Councillors Coughlin and HB Patel

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None declared.

2. Deputations (if any)

None.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 2nd September 2009

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on the 2nd September 2009 be received and approved as an accurate record.

4. Matters Arising (if any)

None.

5. Call-in of Executive Decisions from the Meeting of the Executive on Tuesday, 15th September 2009

Addendum to the West London Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy

Councillor Powney began the discussion by expressing a concern over the achievability of the LAA NI 192 target of reaching a 40% recycling rate for 2010-2011. In response, Councillor Van Colle, Lead Member for Environment, Planning and Culture, explained that the current performance for the borough, as set out in the executive report, was 30% and that rates tended to vary month by month. He stated that in April, June and July the council was achieving in excess of 30%, yet in May it was 29%. He explained that when comparing the same months year by year, recycling rates had greatly increased. Councillor Van Colle commented that

he hoped that the 40% recycling rate would be achieved but that it could not be guaranteed. He explained that the financial costs of reaching 40% were high. The cost of diversion, he stated, was over half a million because of the number of lorries which needed to be used. He explained that the Council was mostly diverting plastic and that this was not terribly economical to recycle.

Councillor Van Colle explained that the council would continue to do everything it could to encourage people to recycle, such as educating residents. Chris Whyte, Head of Environment Management, added that a piece of work which was being undertaken this year was to update the Waste Strategy. He explained that the current system used should allow the council to achieve a 35% recycling rate but could make it difficult to achieve a 40% rate. In order to reach the 40% rate he stated that a waste composition analysis would be carried out, along with the creation of a new modelling system. He explained that it was hoped that new proposals would be available middle part of next year.

Councillor Farrell asked whether there were any financial implications for not reaching the 40% target. In response, Chris Whyte explained that there could be a financial reward linked with this target, but that there would not be any financial penalties if the target was not met. Councillor Farrell requested that information, on what this possible reward entailed, be sent to all members of the committee.

Councillor Farrell raised a concern that leaves on the streets were not being put into the appropriate bag for composting. She explained that she was concerned that the reduction in the use of street care ward officers was resulting in the council carrying out less monitoring on the streets. In response, Chris Whyte explained that leaves may have been put in disposal bags and not recycling bags because the waste may be predominantly litter and therefore not recyclable. Chris Whyte informed the committee that the council was currently developing a leafing plan and that he would take note of this concern and pass it onto the relevant officers.

Modernisation of the Council's financial management arrangements and approval for appointment of consultants

Councillor Castle welcomed Duncan McLeod, Director of Finance and Corporate Resources to the committee. The committee agreed to deal with just the lead officer for this item. Duncan McLeod began by providing the committee with some background information as to why a review into the Council's financial management arrangements was carried out and why there was a need to modernise the arrangements. He explained that the proposals had been developed as part of the 'One Council' stream of work as set out in the Council's Improvement and Efficiency Strategy. He advised that the Council's current financial system was developed in the early 1990s and whilst this system was suitable for the time, it had now become outdated and therefore the service level was not as good as it should be. He commented that there were high standards in some areas and lower standards in others. He added that the Council was already in the process of implementing a single accounting system and so the opportunity was right to review the Council's financial management arrangements.

Members discussed the item and the issues raised in respect of the reasons for call-in. Councillor Powney began the discussion by enquiring whether the reduction,

mentioned in item 10 of the executive report, to 105 or 97 staff from 144, would have an impact on service delivery. He explained that he was concerned that the loss of 30% of the staff could reduce the quality of service delivered. Councillor Powney commented that he was also concerned about diversity implications and that the new arrangements would lead to standardisation, which may affect some individuals more than others and could lead to a decrease in the standard of service quality. Councillor Farrell also raised a concern about standardisation and that it could impact negatively on residents. She was concerned that those who do not have access to computers and therefore, for example, could not access online payments would be disadvantaged by the new arrangements. She commented that there was a body of evidence which suggested that gender, race etc may determine the service that residents receive and therefore equalities impact assessments were very important and should be specific in what they include.

In response to Councillor Powney's first concern about staffing and its effect on service quality, Duncan McLeod stated that he did not believe that service quality would be reduced. He explained that by making the system more efficient, service quality would be improved. He stated that there were activities in the current system that were being carried out which were not value for money. He gave the committee an example of how the Council had been paying individual invoices for every electricity meter in the council and how it would be moving to a system where there would be a single invoice from the electricity company. He explained that by making the system more efficient, less staff would be required to carry out the finance functions and that there would be significant savings to be made from the reduction of staff. He informed the committee that the 144 posts were spread across the Council and that a significant amount of staff were agency staff. Furthermore, a sizeable number had been carrying out other activities as well, so amalgamation would be looked at. Finally, he explained that it wasn't a loss of 30% of the staff as there were a number of vacancies.

In response to Councillor Powney's and Councillor Farrell's concern about standardisation and the possible diversity implications and impact on service quality, Duncan McLeod explained that by making the service more efficient it would improve the service for everyone. He felt the standardisation issue was a wider issue over how residents interact with the Council. Online transactions, he explained, had increased and would continue to do so. However, he stated that this doesn't mean that the Council would not encourage other forms of payment or would necessarily withdraw types of services. He believed that the Council had provided people with more flexibility over how to pay by increasing the number of outlets available and had therefore actually made it more convenient for people. Furthermore, the savings made would be put back into council services. He also assured the committee that telephone contact would still be available. He added that many of the changes focused on transactional services which were not directly front line services and therefore would not greatly affect residents, as long as they were working well. In response to an enquiry about equality impact assessment, he stated that the modernisation process would take place over a number of stages, thus an assessment would need to be carried out at each stage of the process.

Councillor Castle expressed an opinion that it was difficult to predict the impact on equality that the new arrangements would have at this stage. He therefore requested that a briefing note be presented to the committee in four months time to update the committee as to whether there has been any impact on equality.

Duncan McLeod also informed the committee that the Performance and Finance Committee would receive reports on the progress of the project at regular intervals.

6. **The Executive List of Decisions for the Meeting that took place on Tuesday, 15th September 2009**

RESOLVED:-

that the Executive List of Decisions for the meeting that took place on Tuesday, 15th September 2009 be noted.

7. **Briefing Notes/Information Updates requested by the Select Committee following consideration of Version 5 (2009/10) of the Forward Plan**

The Future of Brent in2work and Proposed Joint Employment Venture

It was noted by Councillor Powney that this was a very useful and detailed briefing note.

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note on the Future of Brent in2work and Proposed Joint Employment Venture be noted.

8. **Briefing Notes/Information Updates requesting following consideration of earlier issues of the Forward Plan (2009/10)**

Civic Centre

RESOLVED:-

that the briefing note on the Civic Centre be noted.

9. **The Forward Plan - Issue 6 (2009/10)**

Issue 6 of the Forward Plan (05.10.09 to 08.02.10) was before members of the Select Committee. Following consideration of Issue 6 of the Forward Plan, the Select Committee made the following request:-

Printing Review Tender Results

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item providing information as to what type of printing would be covered, whether the tender covered all buildings and what budget savings would be aimed for. The request was made by Councillor Long. Councillor Powney also requested information as to whether it

would be subject to a corporate print standard which takes into account those with sight problems.

38 Craven Park Road (BACES) – proposed disposal

Members requested a briefing note on this item providing information as to whether this building had been considered as a Children's Centre instead of Challenge House. The request was made by Councillor Long.

Future Acquisition Strategy for the Brent Transport Fleet

The Select Committee requested a briefing note on this item providing information as to what the results of the consultation with users on their preferred type of vehicles were. The request was made by Councillor Long.

Cultural Strategy for Brent

Members requested a briefing note on this item providing information as to what consultation had and would be taking place. The request was made by Councillor Long.

CPZ Update

Councillor Powney noted that in a previous Forward Plan Select Committee it had been requested that the CPZs, which were to be included in the report, be listed in the Forward Plan.

Authority to participate in a West London collaboration procurement for residential and nursing care for adults

and

Authority to participate in a West London collaboration procurement for domiciliary care

Members requested a briefing note on these items providing information as to what gains, aside from savings, would there be for service users and whether residential and nursing care would stay in the borough. The request was made by Councillor Long.

Extensions of the Direct Payments Support and Advice Service Contract with Penderels Trust and proposals to review the current arrangements for the service.

Having noted that this contract had already been extended, members requested a briefing note providing an explanation as to what the reasons for a delay in issuing a new contract were and when this would occur. Information ensuring confirmation

that tendering had taken place was also requested. The request was made by Councillor Long.

10. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 3rd November 2009.

11. **Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm

A CASTLE
Chair