



**MINUTES OF THE PARTNERSHIP AND PLACE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Tuesday, 13 December 2011 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Van Kalwala (Chair) and Councillors Brown, Harrison, Hirani, Naheerathan, HB Patel and RS Patel

An apology for absence was received from: Councillor Clues

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 October 2011

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 October 2011 be approved as an accurate record, subject to the following amendment:-

Add 'Councillor Naheerathan' under 'present'.

3. Matters arising

Tenancy Strategy

In reply to an update request from Councillor Hirani, Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director – Policy, Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) advised that the Tenancy Strategy was presently in draft form and was going through the initial consultation stages. A revised draft strategy would be put to a fuller consultation in the New Year.

Anti-Social Behaviour in Brent

Councillor Hirani sought an update in respect of closure orders in the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 being used to close down khat houses in Brent. The Chair sought further information with regard to benchmarking with other local authorities, whether crime data per ward could be circulated to councillors and also whether information relating to racial hate crime was available.

Jacqueline Casson (Senior Policy Officer, Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) confirmed that she would seek further information from Genny Renard (Head of Integrated Community Safety and Development, Strategy Partnerships and Improvement) on the issues raised.

4. Tackling employment issues in Brent

Andrea Lagos (Lead Language2work Personal Consultant, Strategy, Partnerships and Improvement) introduced the report and gave an overview of employment trends in Brent. She advised the committee that around 12,000 people, representing 9.3% of Brent's total workforce, were presently unemployed, compared to 8.3% average in London and 7.7% average nationally. Harlesden, Stonebridge, Kilburn and Kensal Green wards had the highest number of working age people in receipt of out-of-work benefits, whilst it was noted that 34.1% of those 16 years and under lived in households with less than 60% of the median income, which classified them as living in poverty. The rise of young people claiming benefits since October 2010 was in line with the lack of job vacancies and lack of experience, as well as the impact on increased educational fees.

Andrea Lagos advised that the Government's intention to "encourage responsibility and fairness in the welfare system" had also made a significant impact, which included replacing the welfare to work schemes with a single Work Programme, a re-assessment of people on Incapacity Benefits and reforming the welfare benefits system with a Universal Credit which was due to be introduced in 2013. Local housing allowance caps were to be introduced in January 2012 and was of particular concern to London boroughs, and in Brent, including in the most deprived areas where rents were comparatively expensive. The Work Programme was delivered through the council working with Jobcentre Plus and three Work Programme providers.

Terry Dackombe (Partnership Manager for Brent, Jobcentre Plus, Department for Work and Pensions) then addressed the committee. He explained that the majority of those receiving the Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) were first time claimants, many of whom were back in work within 13 weeks, whilst 90% of first time claimants returned to employment within 52 weeks. Members noted that participation on the Work Programme was mandatory for those on JSA aged 18 -24 years who had been claiming for nine months or more, and for those of 25 years plus who had been claiming for a year or more. Before claimants became eligible for the Work Programme, Jobcentre Plus would assist them in obtaining places on skills related courses run by the College of North West London (CNWL) and Brent Adult and Community Education Service (BACES). There was no eligibility criteria and claimants could apply to access the courses from the first day of their claim. Terry Dackombe emphasised that the courses provided skills certificates that were recognised by employers and not necessarily what customers would like to study. This was undertaken by assessing in what areas of employment there were most vacancies and what skills were in demand, which included office, administrative, hospitality, IT and care skills. CNWL had two employment advisers to assist in this area, whilst Jobcentre Plus had an employment adviser in Outreach. A minimum target of 50% of those who had completed their course to obtain sustained employment after 26 weeks was set and work placements, volunteering and post course provision was arranged for those who did not manage to find employment. Terry Dackombe explained that the courses had commenced in September 2011 and to date 23 had gained employment, although some courses were yet to finish. Jobcentre plus was also working in partnership with the Regeneration Team, drug treatment agencies and also Brent NHS to help improve access to psychological therapy.

Carl Headrish (Maximus Employment and Training), representing one of the Work Programme providers, was invited to address Members. Carl Headrish stated that Maximus was a global company that were new to working in Brent. Maximus had experience of running Work Programmes in areas such as Kent and Surrey and had teamed up with the Careers Development Group (CDG) to deliver in Brent. It was noted that Maximus had been the number one provider for the Flexible New Deal programme. Carl Headrish advised that efforts were being made to build a portfolio with a large number of partners in Brent and the delivery model included use of advisers, tutors and employment engagement staff. The committee heard that Maximus, like all other Work Programme providers, only received payment when a client had successfully gained sustainable employment. Clients received assistance in three separate ways, including:-

- Help at interviews, help into work and support in skills provision once in employment
- Increase in sign posting and seeking what employment opportunities were available
- Helping the harder to help, such as those with disabilities, the homeless and ex-offenders

Sukaina Jerai (Deputy Operations Manager, Work Programme - Ingeus), representing another of the Work Programme providers, then addressed the committee. Sukaina Jerai advised that Ingeus had been operating in Brent since 2003 and were based in Wembley Park. Upon clients approaching Ingeus, appointments would then be made where information would be obtained for a diagnosis check to be undertaken. The client would then be seen by an Insight Adviser for six weeks and were placed in various streams, these being:-

- Boost stream – for those willing to work
- Engagement stream – for those not wishing to work
- Steps to work stream – for ESF customers only who required a lot of support
- ELT stream – this did not fulfil a teaching function but to support its' clients into work

Sukaina Jerai explained that the streams ran in parallel with each other and internal workshops were held to help with matters such as access into work. Customers may also be referred to the ACE network which would help provide them with specialist support that could not be provided by Ingeus. The Employer Services Team would seek positions for clients, whilst the In Work Support Team kept regular contact with clients. The Rapid Response Team's role was to help those who had lost employment at short notice, whilst the Careers Academy helped customers with their longer term future.

The committee noted that George Fella, representing Reed in Partnership and the third Work Programme provider in Brent, had given an apology for absence.

Maggie Pulle (Deputy Principal, CNWL) was then invited to address the committee. She began by explaining that the College had some 8,000 adult students and was Skills Funding Agency (SFA) funded. CNWL had focused on providing the necessary skills for employability in the last three years. Around a third of adult students did not pay for their own courses as they were on benefits and there were

approximately 2,500 ESOL students. Projects had been created to help students to get straight into work and CNWL worked in partnership with Brent in2 Work and Quintain, particularly with regard to construction in Wembley. Maggie Pulle advised that employers advised CNWL of what skills they needed and CNWL would then put together the appropriate courses for students to acquire these skills. Members heard that although the economic climate had slowed progress with regard to the Quintain development, Quintain were briefing prospective tenants in December 2011 and it was possible that employment opportunities in construction may become available soon. Further employment opportunities with regard to the Willesden Green redevelopment project may also be a possibility. It was noted that CNWL were due to run courses in construction in January 2012.

Members then discussed the item in some depth. Councillor Hirani commented that there was concern that not all stakeholders were being properly engaged, including the council and CNWL and he asked for an update in respect of this at a future meeting. He enquired whether a set list of potential partners existed and whether ward statistics in relation to those referred to the Work Programme were available. It was also asked whether free courses for those with lower skilled jobs were available. Councillor Hirani asked what consideration was given in respect of apprenticeships and was the largest single problem attributable to there simply being not enough job vacancies at present. He also sought views as to how Members in their role as councillors could contribute.

Councillor Harrison enquired about the age range of those participating in the Work Programme and CNWL courses and were the courses suitable for all clients. She also asked what measures were in place to check that those who had gone into self-employment were still in sustainable employment. Councillor R S Patel asked what action was taken to involve the hard to reach and what degree of success there was in finding work for the unemployed with young families who may have problems finding the appropriate childcare.

Councillor Brown enquired if clients were allowed to join the Work Programme earlier than the prescribed criteria and if information was available with regard to the Work Programme providers' success rate in finding employment for their clients and the payments received as a result. He suggested that it would be useful for the committee to have updates on the number enrolled in CNWL courses and those who were in sustained employment and also to draw comparisons between Brent and London overall.

Councillor H B Patel asked whether most CNWL courses were organised in advance or specifically tailored according to the employment needs at any one particular time. With regard to customers, he enquired on the proportion directly referred to the CNWL compared to those who had been placed on courses by their employers. Councillor H B Patel sought more information on those who had been referred to the Work Programme, in particular what parts of Brent had they come from and were these from areas of high unemployment. He asked whether there were any measures in place to try and increase the number of employment vacancies and was there any action being taken to address the Housing Benefit cap. Councillor H B Patel enquired what steps were being taken to tackle unemployment in areas that were underprivileged. He also asked whether the notes of London Board meetings would be available to local authorities.

The Chair commented that regular dialogue between the council and the Work Programme provider was desirable to ensure that shared priorities were being addressed. He asked whether postcode data could be collected in respect of those referred to CNWL courses and Work Programme providers respectively. Details were sought with regard to what steps were being taken to help those in deprived areas. The Chair enquired what were the most difficult client groups to help. Information was requested on the council's approach with regard to apprenticeships and whether employers could be encouraged to offer apprenticeships during procurement exercises. The Chair also asked what options were available to those customers who had not found work within 13 weeks of claiming JSA but were yet to reach the threshold date to participate in the Work Programme.

In reply to the issues raised, Sukaina Jerai advised that Ingeus worked closely with Jobcentre Plus who referred clients to them through the Work Programme, and Brent in2 Work. As Ingeus worked across West London, clients could access a number of organisations, including Fit for Sport, the ACE network and Brent MIND. The list of organisations continued to grow and as the local knowledge base increased, more local providers could be added. Efforts were made both at local and national level to identify more job vacancies, such as liaising with superstores and at London level, the retail, security and administrative sectors were amongst those targeted. A work benefit calculation was available to help those who also had childcare commitments and to provide additional support. Sukaina Jerai felt that engagement with partners overall was high, however with regard to providing data, she stated that this could be provided by the Department of Work and Pensions, although providing meaningful data would be difficult at this stage. However, efforts would be made to identify trends and report back at a future meeting of the committee. Sukaina Jerai advised that the Department for Work and Pensions would hold records of London Board meetings.

Dominic Hunt (Ingeus) added that because the Work Programme was mandatory for JSA claimants after a certain period, it was difficult for Work Programme providers to target particular groups or areas. With regard to those with childcare commitments, an understanding of their situation would be obtained to help advise them accordingly. The hard to reach could also be assisted through ESF referrals. Concerning the Housing Benefit cap, clients would be signposted to the relevant organisations for assistance. Dominic Hunt welcomed councillors' help such as identifying any likely employment vacancies.

Carl Headrish explained that Maximus were looking at partner matching when building its customer base and a matrix of all service types was being developed. Maximus continued to work in partnership with the council, colleges and contractors. Carl Headrish explained that he would need to see what data could be provided regarding the locations of those entering the Work Programme and it was expected that the majority of long term unemployed would come from more deprived areas. Clients were sometimes encouraged to enter self-employment where appropriate and in such instances they would receive advice on how they could become competitive in their chosen trade. Such clients would then continue to be assisted through the in work support structure and receive advice on matters such as money management. Carl Headrish advised that the Work Programme providers were not funded to seek apprenticeships for clients and apprenticeships were more scarce for those that were 18 years or older.

Maggie Pulle advised that although the majority of courses were organised some time in advance, CNWL would also respond to particular events in Brent, such as providing courses in retail during the Wembley redevelopment. The courses enrolled a mixture of those who were already in work and looking to improve their skill set, those referred by Jobcentre plus and also ESOL students. Maggie Pulle confirmed that data by ward could be sent with regard to those students on JSA. The committee noted that courses were only free for those on benefits and any already in employment would be required to pay the course fee.

Terry Dackombe informed Members that the Work Programme contract was awarded on a regional basis. Members heard that Reed, for example, were working in partnership with 35 regional organisations and as each provider gained more local knowledge, more partnerships would be made. The age range of CNWL and Work Programme clients was wide and no one was excluded from a course on the basis of their age. Terry Dackombe advised that clients could choose to enter the Work Programme prior to the criteria thresholds if they so wished, otherwise they were eligible to enroll on either CNWL or BACES courses. If a particular course was over referred, the colleges were able to set up additional courses. As the Work Programme had only commenced in June 2011, it was too early to identify particular data trends at this stage. Previously, Brent had been declared an Employment Zone and under this organisations received the same funding regardless of who was brought into employment. However, under the Work Programme, providers were paid according to a graded scale and paid higher where clients of a more challenging nature had gained sustainable employment. Although the client database used by Jobcentre Plus did not include ward details, Terry Dackombe acknowledged that it would be beneficial to see who came from areas of greater deprivation such as Harlesden and Kilburn to see if an enhanced service could be provided in these areas. In addition, assistance could also be given to complex families and the hardest group to help tended to be ex-offenders. For particularly challenging cases, working in partnership with relevant organisations such as Addaction was essential as well as identifying potential organisations that may be more receptive to such clients. There had been some success in this area with regard to clients with mild mental health issues, however greater resources were required for challenging cases. Terry Dackombe advised that efforts were being made to identify potential employers who were willing to provide more training for the clients and Jobcentre Plus were also working with the National Apprenticeship Service on this issue.

Andrea Lagos advised that the Training and Development Team were seeking to increase apprenticeships within the council and also encouraging employers to offer such schemes. Work was also taking place with BACES to provide a pre-apprenticeship programme.

Cathy Tyson added that there would need to be careful consideration of the legal implications concerning procurement exercises using apprenticeships as part of the criteria, however this could be explored as one of the criteria on the Government's guidance on procurement included social value. She advised that monthly unemployment rates by ward were available and action was being taken to provide greater employment sustainability, particularly to help wards with higher levels of unemployment.

The Chair thanked the presenters and emphasised the need for regular dialogue with partners to ensure the shared priorities were pursued.

5. Partnership and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Jacqueline Casson advised that at the request of the Chair, the Borough Commander had been invited to attend the next meeting to discuss policing priorities in Brent. There was also to be an item on the draft Crime Strategy.

6. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Partnership and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to take place on Thursday, 9 February 2012 at 7.30 pm.

7. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm.

Z VAN KALWALA
Chair