

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Tuesday, 17th April 2007 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor D Long (Chair) and Councillors Clues (Vice Chair), Detre, Fox, Mendoza, Sneddon and Thomas.

Also present were Councillors Castle, Dunwell and Mistry.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Leaman.

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

There were none.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting – 8th February 2007

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 8th February 2007 be received and approved as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

There were none.

4. Appointments to Sub-Committees

There were none.

5. Deputations

There were none.

6. Community Care Annual Report on Complaints.

Lance Douglas (Assistant Director of Quality and Support) and Ken Scott (Complaints Manager) attended the meeting to answer questions. Members were reminded that regulations and legislation required that an annual report on social services complaints be presented to a committee of the Council.

The Committee was informed that the 2006/07 annual report was in progress and would be completed later in the year. Ken Scott explained that the 2005/06 annual report outlined the context and operation of the complaints procedure, the number and type of complaints made during the year and how these were dealt with. Members were informed that most complaints were dealt with at stage one. It was reported that 60% of stage one complaints were responded to within 15 working days and 26% of stage two complaints were met within the legislative timescales. However, the four complaints that

had escalated to stage three had not met the required deadlines. It was noted that 13% of community care complaints had escalated from stage one to stage two, and this was outside of the Council's target of 10%. The escalation rate from stage two to stage three was 21% which was slightly higher than the Council's target of 20%. However, it was stated that the percentage of complaints that had escalated onto the next stage was relatively low compared to other main service areas. Members were informed that the percentage of complaints that escalated onto the next stage would decrease as a result of recent changes to the escalation targets. It was also stated that changes in legislation and procedures had extended the time scales within which complaints needed to be dealt.

It was pointed out to the Committee that the number of complaints received should not be seen as a negative indicator because the Council encouraged complaints as a means of hearing what customers thought of the service they received. In light of this, Members sought to determine what indicators were used to measure the performance of the service. They questioned the premise that the number of complaints did not reflect a performance standard. In order to get a better perspective on performance, a request was made for comparative figures from other peer boroughs.

The Chair requested that future similar reports should explain more fully what was meant by the number of complaints not being a reflection of the service offered and how performance was therefore measured.

It was reported that research conducted by the Complaints Team showed that the escalation of complaints was mainly due to insufficient responses at stage one. Nevertheless, feedback from complainants suggested that they were generally satisfied with the overall complaints process. Members noted that future reports to the Committee would include a comparison of complaint results and percentages from other boroughs.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted; and
- (ii) that future annual complaint reports include a comparison with other peer boroughs and explain more fully how performance is measured.

7. tPCT Turnaround Plan Task Group referral to Overview and Scrutiny

Councillor Clues (Chair, Health Select Committee), Phil Newby (Director of Policy and Regeneration) and Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director of Policy and Regeneration) introduced the tPCT Turnaround Plan Task Group report.

Councillor Clues requested that the Committee consider the recommendations put forward from the Health Select Committee and that consideration be given to ways of repairing the partnership between the PCT and the Council to make it work more effectively in the future. He emphasised that it was imperative that the PCT and the Council work together to resolve issues relating to public,

nursing and sexual health, which had become the main areas of concern. Members were notified that the change of personnel at all levels in the PCT had added to difficulties in maintaining the partnership.

Some members commended the work of the Task Group and the Health Select Committee and stated that they appreciated that the issue was difficult to resolve. The Committee was informed that a report on the impact of the cuts on the Council was being produced and would be presented to a future meeting of the Performance and Finance Select Committee.

Some members questioned the justification of the referral to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as the PCT was regarded as an issue within the Health Select Committee remit. In reply, Debra Norman (Legal Adviser) advised that there were no legal obstacles that prevented the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from working on the issues raised by the Health Select Committee. Peter Goss (Democratic Services Manager) added that the Health Select Committee was a sub-committee of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and therefore it was proper for it to refer issues to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Cathy Tyson explained that the report was requesting that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee allow other overview and scrutiny sub-committees to investigate areas of concern that fell under their remit and for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to examine the impact of the plan and the future of the partnership.

Some members felt that the partnership between the PCT and the Council was a matter for the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). In response, Cathy Tyson stated that the LSP was concerned with a range of partnership issues, including health, equalities and the wellbeing strategy. She explained that performance was monitored by the LSP through the Local Area Agreements. She added that it was important that the Committee looked at the long term implications that had arisen out of the work of the Task Group, and that the Committee might also want to look at the partnership in its entirety and how the relationship should be conducted.

Councillor Clues added that the Health Select Committee would monitor the financial position of all local trusts and the continuing PCT deficit. He explained that the Health Select Committee and the Task Group were reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as it was the parent Committee and that the action of the main Committee might have a rippling effect on the overall PCT issue.

Phil Newby concluded that officers would produce a list of issues which highlighted areas of legitimate concern, and this would be presented to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED:-

that the Director of Policy and Regeneration produce a list of issues that highlight areas of legitimate concern regarding the PCT for consideration by this Committee.

8. **Tourism Task Group**

Councillor Dunwell as the Chair of the Tourism Task Group updated the Committee on the work of the Task Group. It was noted that the other members of the Task Group were Councillors Corcoran and Jones.

The Task Group had investigated various issues surrounding tourism in Brent, such as how activities were co-ordinated, what were Brent's main tourism attractions and the type of funding available. It was noted that there was not an overall tourism strategy in the Council. Councillor Dunwell reported that there was funding available from central government to improve tourism in the borough, and that the Council departments had been asked how the service could be improved to promote tourism in Brent. He added that the work of the Task Group was extensive, and that the report would identify further work that could be undertaken.

Members requested that a clear definition of tourism be included in the draft report.

RESOLVED: -

- (i) that the update be noted;
- (ii) that a draft report from the Task Group be presented at the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee in May; and
- (iii) that the draft report include a clear definition of what tourism means in the context of Brent.

9. **Voluntary Sector Funding Task Group.**

Councillor Mistry as the Chair of the Voluntary Sector Funding Task Group updated the Committee on the work of the Task Group. It was noted other members were Councillors Fox and Pagnamenta.

Councillor Mistry reported that the Task Group was set up to investigate funding in the voluntary sector. The Committee was informed that the Council provided grants to voluntary services throughout Brent. The Task Group had gathered information from various Council departments and service user forums. The way other local authorities distributed and monitored grants had been investigated. The Task Group had attended the Voluntary Sector Service User Forum in March to gain a greater understanding of how the voluntary sector felt about the funding regime. One major finding was that the voluntary sector sometimes found it difficult to access funding and that the Council had no overall grant tracking system in place.

It was stated that it was difficult to track grants as some services received grants from more than one Council department. The Committee noted that most grants were made on an historical basis and many new voluntary groups failed the application process. It was noted that problems surrounding grants would be reduced if a centralised database system was introduced to monitor and log applications and if applicants were given better guidance when completing the application form.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the update be noted; and
- (ii) that the report from the Task Group be presented at the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee in May 2007.

10. **Area and Service User Forums and Consultations Update**

Councillor Castle introduced the report and stated that the forum cycle had not been completed at the time the report was written. It was noted that the Youth Matters² Service User Consultative Forum (SUCF) and the Children's SUCF had been discontinued and had been replaced by the Youth Parliament.

Owen Thomson (Head of Consultation) added that the report outlined the key issues and trends across Area Consultative Forums (ACF) and Service User Consultative Forums (SUCF) that had arisen during the third cycle of meetings in 2006-07. It was also suggested that Councillor J Long be invited to attend a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss the issue raised at the Private Sector Forum.

RESOLVED: -

- (i) that the report be noted; and
- (ii) that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee receive a report on the issue of licensing of Homes in Multiple Occupation raised by the Private Sector SUCF at a future meeting and that Councillor J Long be invited to attend to discuss the issues raised.

11. **Suggested Topics for Overview and Scrutiny Task Groups.**

After discussions, the Committee identified the following as priorities for topics for Task Groups;

Increase participation in sport

A number of Council priorities, including the Corporate Strategy and the Local Area Agreement, have objectives to increase participation in sport and physical activity as a method for addressing wider objectives such as improved health and well-being and creating a vibrant, lively borough. The review could include looking at how we can develop good quality sustainable sports clubs in the borough and how we can encourage community groups to provide quality sports opportunities.

Town Centre Regeneration

Brent Town Centres have been in decline over the years due to a number of reasons of which competition from neighbouring centres and a lack of investment in infrastructure are key contributory factors. The review would consider existing strategies and look at new ways to promote town centre regeneration.

Sub Regional Housing Policy

Look at the changes in regional and sub-regional approaches to the development of housing policy. The review would include the extent of the Mayor's powers and their impact at local level. The relationship between strategy and policy development at the local, sub-regional and regional levels and, in particular, the extent to which the Council can influence decision making at the wider levels.

RESOLVED: -

that task groups be established to undertake investigations into increasing participation in sport and town centre regeneration, and the issue of sub regional housing policy be reconsidered when resources permit further task groups to be established.

12. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be confirmed at the Annual Meeting of Full Council in May 2007.

13. Any Other Urgent Business

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.55pm

D Long
Chair