

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Tuesday, 11th December 2007 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Jones (Chair) and Councillors Detre, Dunwell, R Moher and Thomas.

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

There were none.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

Councillor Dunwell asked that it be noted that he did not agree that the minutes were a correct record on the grounds that much of what was said at the meeting was not recorded.

RESOLVED:-

that subject to the first word of the 4th paragraph under the heading *Tourism in Brent final report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group* being changed from "The" to "A", the minutes of the meeting held on 10th October 2007 be received and approved as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

There were none.

4. Appointments to Sub-Committee

RESOLVED:-

that Councillor Van Kalwala be appointed in place of Councillor Jones on the Performance and Finance Select Committee and Councillor Jones be appointed as his first alternate.

5. Deputations

There were none.

6. Future of Customer Contact

A briefing note entitled *Customer Contact Transformation – progress to 28th November 2007* was circulated at the meeting. (A copy of this is available on the Council's website).

Sandra Carson (Assistant Director Customer Services – Housing and Community Care) briefed the Committee on the Customer Contact Transformation project, with the aid of a Powerpoint presentation. She covered four main headings: the vision–key points from the programme agreed by the Council in March 2007, progress to date, lessons learned and issues raised so far, and conclusions and next steps.

In answer to questions, Sandra Carson explained that the decision had been taken that if the service was to change in the way envisaged then it would benefit from being given the new title of Customer Contact. Local offices were to be transformed to customer contact points. She also explained that whilst new working groups had been established to support the transformation project there had previously been long established groups overseeing the delivery of customer services. In reply to a question about the upgrading of the Automated Call Distribution system, Sandra Carson explained that there were plans to provide a limited caller options menu but not to the point that it would prevent anyone getting through to speak to someone. Members were concerned that this should be the case and asked that this point be noted. With regard to the overspend on the Kingsbury One Stop Shop it was explained that it was now apparent that the initial estimation had been too low. As a result other schemes within the project were being reviewed but none of these were on the scale of the works at Kingsbury OSS. Officers from Customer Services would continue to work on this with their colleagues in Property Services who were responsible for costing the works.

A view was expressed that the information made available to the Committee did not best serve Overview and Scrutiny. Instead it supported the work of the Executive when some non-executive Members had concerns that the promised improvement in service delivery would not materialise. Concern was expressed that the One Stop Shop service had always provided face to face contact and that the proposals were moving away from that. The point was made that other voluntary organisations within the borough provided services by means of telephone support. It was suggested that residents had been discouraged from using the interim appointment service in Kilburn and therefore it was misleading to say that only 12 people had needed appointments. It was asked what effect the proposed merger of libraries with the customer contact service would have on the staff involved and if the staff had been consulted.

The Chair expressed disappointment that the Executive Lead Member for the service was not present to answer some of the concerns being raised by Members of the Committee.

A point was made that whilst it had been suggested that there was little need for an appointment service in Kilburn, such provision would improve the service by enabling expert resources to be available for each appointment. Given that a face to face service was expensive it was important to ensure resources were used effectively. Whilst it was accepted that Kilburn customers could access the Willesden service, the fact that so many people

visited Willesden with documents meant that the service offered at Willesden might need to be respecified.

Because of the delay in redeveloping the Kingsbury office the Committee noted that there would be limited time to learn from the pilot but Sandra Carson assured Members that it would be long enough having already learnt from existing trends being monitored.

Sandra Carson explained that the transformation of the service required additional management resource but that savings would accrue later from economies in staffing. The pace of change was of concern to some Members who felt that the project was being driven by the need to make savings rather than with the aim of providing an improved service.

Reference was made to the provision of on-line facilities for residents to resolve their queries and in answer to a question on whether this was on target to deliver, Sandra Carson replied that staff training was being provided specifically to enable this. However the point was made that not all people were able to write out their case and they needed to be able to access a face to face service and get a quick response. Sandra Carson fully acknowledged this point.

In light of the concerns expressed the Committee asked that a further report be presented in six months time when some experience of the new arrangements could be reviewed. The Committee asked that this be a written report for inclusion with the agenda for the meeting and also asked that the Executive Lead Member be requested to attend to answer questions.

RESOLVED:

that a further progress report on the Customer Contact Transformation project be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 6 months time at which the Executive Lead Member be requested to attend to answer questions Members may have.

7. Older Peoples Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Edwin Ambe (Principal Strategy and Planning Officer, Housing and Community Care) introduced the draft Older People's Wellbeing Strategy 2007–12 with the aid of a Powerpoint presentation.

It was pointed out that the strategy referred to prevention whereas current services largely only responded to a critical need and the question was asked how this shift would be achieved. Edwin Ambe replied that the emphasise on prevention came from a national perspective and the strategy sought to commit to this through a change in approach. The ambition was to look at the services already offered and seek to make them better and think about how they could be delivered more effectively. The strategy was a top level document under which officers would have to pick up on the detail and

progress work already in hand in a way that achieved the strategy's objectives. However, Members expressed concern that there were no costings shown in the action plan and no indication of how the improvements envisaged would be delivered.

Members questioned the age of older people starting at 50 and although acknowledging this followed the national approach by the Department of Health some felt the strategy could more usefully concentrate on the needs of the over 60's or over 65's. In response to this Edwin Ambe explained that the intention was to develop the well being of the over 50's by encouraging them to follow a healthy lifestyle that would support them in later life. Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director, Policy and Regeneration) added that it was important to view the strategy in the context of the work of partner agencies. The strategy pulled together a range of activities undertaken by both the Council and its partners and this was one of the reasons why it was not possible to cost it at this stage. Indeed much of the strategy would be delivered through co-ordination of existing budgets rather than additional expenditure.

Members continued to be concerned that the strategy did not contain any targets and asked how in the future its success could be measured. In response Edwin Ambe stated that it was a 5 year strategy which consisted of services that the Council and its partners were already developing. Consultation could be carried out in the future to see if the delivery of the services had improved. He added that some targets could be included but these tended to be contained in other existing service plans.

The Chair raised specific concerns on a number of points included in the strategy, including the inability of BACES to provide subsidised courses to older people because of the age discrimination legislation, the dangers of equity release schemes on which people needed expert advice, what role the Council had in treating sickness and thereby its ability to shift resources into preventative measures and how the issue of hospital bed blocking could be addressed. Members generally felt that someone needed to have overall ownership of the strategy if it was to stand any chance of successfully delivering its objectives. Edwin Ambe explained that all Council departments had contributed to the strategy and it would be necessary to draw on existing resources to meet some of the activities listed in the action plan.

Given the concerns raised by Members of the Committee it was agreed that the comments made at the meeting should be put to the Executive and in the meantime the Director of Housing and Community Care should be made aware of the concerns of the Committee so that he could take a decision on whether the draft strategy needed revising.

RESOLVED:

that the concerns of Members on the draft Older People's Wellbeing Strategy for 2007–12, as expressed at the meeting, be conveyed to the Director of Housing and Community Care so that he may take a view on whether the strategy needs revising before its submission to the Executive and subject to

the outcome of this, the Chair of the Committee be asked to ensure the Committee's concerns are made known to the Executive.

8. Post Office Closures

The Committee received a report which set out details of the Government's decision to close 2,500 Post Offices in the UK and proposed a way in which the Council could respond to these proposals. The Director of Policy and Regeneration suggested that Post Office managers might be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee or the proposed task group depending on the timetable for getting a response back to the Post Office.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that a task group be established to formulate a response to the Post Office on its proposals for Post Office closures in Brent.
- (ii) that a member from each of the political groups on the Council be invited to serve on the task group,
- (iii) that Post Office managers be invited to attend either the Committee or task group depending on the timetable for consultation.

9. Increasing Participation in Sport through Sports Clubs

The Committee received a report providing an update on the work of the Increasing Participation in Sport through Sports Clubs task group. Jacqueline Casson (Senior Policy Officer, Policy and Regeneration) explained that the chair of the task group was unable to be present because of another Council commitment. Members noted that the task group's timetable envisaged it submitting its final report to the next meeting of the Committee, however Members were concerned that it was given sufficient time to properly complete its work even if this meant reporting back to the following meeting in April.

RESOLVED:

that the update on the work of the Increasing Participation in Sport through Sports Clubs task group be noted.

10. Update from the Town Centre Regeneration Task Group

The Committee received a report providing an update on the work of the Town Centre Regeneration task group. The Chair of the task group (and Committee) introduced the recommendations that were emerging from the work undertaken by the task group. A request was made for the task group to link its work with that of the task group on Post Office closures established earlier in the meeting. A request was also made for the task group to explore

all the things the Council might do to encourage improvements to the borough's town centres. The Director of Policy and Regeneration stated that the critical aspect to regenerating a town centre was to get local people into jobs and thereby increase local spending power.

RESOLVED:

that the update on the work of the Town Centre Regeneration task group be noted.

11. **Work Programme and Tracking Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations**

The Committee was invited to take the opportunity to review its work programme, develop options for inclusion of topics in the programme and discuss how it might best track the outcome of the recommendations it makes.

The Chair stated that she wished the status of task groups to be raised and more work done on reviewing how seriously the recommendations of task groups were taken and to track their implementation.

In answer to whether the Committee might consider the work of the Local Strategic Partnership 'Partners for Brent', it was suggested that Members might want to request a report on the work of the Partnership and ask the Chair to attend one of its meetings.

Members considered the suggested items for future task group work and put them in a priority order.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that a report on the work of the Local Strategic Partnership be included in the Committee's work programme;
- (ii) that future task groups be established as and when resources to support them become available in the following priority order:
 - Transition services for socially excluded 18-25 year olds
 - Local bus routes to hospitals in Brent
 - Community use of Council owned buildings
 - Procurement and the equality duties
- (iii) that the process for tracking recommendations made by Overview and Scrutiny through to their implementation, as outlined in the report submitted, be agreed.

12. **Date of next meeting**

The Chair thanked Councillor Castle for taking responsibility for the work of the Committee during Councillor Long's illness.

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 6th February 2008.

13. **Any other urgent business**

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9:48pm

L JONES
Chair