

**MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> February 2008 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Jones (Chair) and Councillors Bessong (for Cllr Sneddon), Detre, Dunwell, R Moher, Motley (for Cllr Leaman) and Thomas.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Allie.

**1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests**

There were none.

**2. Minutes of Last Meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2007 be received and approved as an accurate record.

**3. Matters Arising**

*Post Office Closures*

The Chair noted that the Post Office task group would commence work in the near future. Committee members expressed the view that it would be valuable to ask the lead members to attend the next meeting of the Committee to comment on this work, but noted that the date of the next meeting would need to be brought forward to accommodate this. The Democratic Services officer agreed to liaise with the Chair outside of the meeting to schedule the new date.

RESOLVED:-

that the date of the next meeting be re-arranged subject to consultation with the Chair.

**4. Deputations**

There were none.

**5. Brent Multi Agency Adult Protection Annual Report Summary**

Christabel Shawcross (Assistant Director Community Care – Housing and Community Care) introduced the report, which outlined national developments as well as the progress made in Brent during the previous year. She drew the

Committee's attention to key issues in the report and to the plans for future growth and improvement, and introduced Sarah McDermott (Safeguarding Adults Coordinator, Housing and Community Care) and Parin Robins (Brent teaching Primary Care Trust) who elaborated upon the detail in the report.

Sarah McDermott advised that this had been a very positive partnership and illustrated that there had been a 14.5% increase in referrals during the past year, the majority of which had been dealing with older, white adults, who had been the victim of financial abuse. Members heard that carers or family members had been found to be the main culprits, and that police action was taken in the event of the culprit having been an employee. A tracking system had been developed detailing the outcomes for vulnerable adults, who were often moved to alternative accommodation following abuse allegations, both in order to better meet their needs and to ensure their safety. Sarah McDermott explained that an action plan had been developed in conjunction with the tracking system to ensure the national recommendations had been met.

In response to questions, Parin Robins explained that attendance had been sporadic on the part of the PCT representatives given the financial uncertainty the PCT had experienced over the past year; however the situation was now more stable and it was hoped that the PCT would be able to re-engage more continuously. Christabel Shawcross advised that consideration had also been given as to how to engage partners more directly, such as tackling more partner-specific issues at Committee level.

Some members enquired about the feedback received from those cases which were subject to police action. Sarah McDermott confirmed that whilst feedback was always requested, it was however very difficult to obtain a criminal conviction via the Crown Prosecution Service, and that the aim was to make better progress in this area.

Following questions from members regarding funding for training, Christabel Shawcross advised that training remained ongoing as it was highly effective as a preventative measure; however there was no pooled or ongoing funding. Parin Robins advised that individual agencies provided training for individual staff, but that this did not necessarily highlight how to address the issue of abuse and the procedure for reporting such abuse. Members were advised that the previous year's funding had been received from the Brent Performance Fund. It was agreed that further funding contributions would be sought from the Brent Performance Fund for the upcoming financial year, but that additional sources of funding needed to be actively sourced.

Members noted that a majority of referrals had originated from those individuals whose heritage was white and expressed concerns that, given that Brent was an ethnic-minority majority borough, there was a significant level of under-reporting amongst those individuals of an ethnic minority background. It was acknowledged that there were gaps in levels of reporting amongst different ethnic backgrounds, particularly in relation to those with an Asian background, and Christabel Shawcross confirmed that work had been conducted to promote awareness amongst people of Asian heritage.

Mention was made of the absence of any detailed indication of the costs of these services and it was agreed that this information would be included in the next updated report. With regard to questions concerning any investigatory powers of the Community Care department, Christabel Shawcross advised that the department had no such power to compel the acquisition of data, and that such power would necessarily stem from either the police or the Committee for Social Care Inspection (CSCI).

The Chair thanked the officers involved for their hard work and advised that the issue of funding for training would be raised with the Lead Member for Adults, Health and Social Care, who was unable to be present at this meeting, at the earliest opportunity.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

## **6. Fees for Licences in respect of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)**

Steve Wilson (Head of Private Sector Housing – Housing and Community Care) attended to answer members' questions on the report, which contained information supplied regarding the reviewed fees for HMO licenses. He advised that the work carried out, which had also involved neighbouring boroughs in west London, involved robust background checks into the backgrounds and the paperwork provided by the landlords.

In answer to questions, Steve Wilson explained that the number of licence applications was expected to fall during the coming year, but that it was anticipated that the workload stemming from enforcement of the terms of the licences would increase. Members discussed some different methods of monitoring expenditure and enquired whether there was any financial reward following successful prosecution of landlords. Steve Wilson advised that it was possible to be reimbursed with a small percentage of the legal costs following a successful prosecution, although there would always be some cost to the local authority as the costs were not entirely reimbursed and there was no other form of financial reward. The cost of the sanctions borne by the offender for breaching the terms of the licence was however significant.

The question of how many HMO licences existed in the borough was raised, and Steve Wilson explained that it was mandatory only for households with three storeys, five households and shared amenities to be licensed; those homes which had been converted into self-contained flats did not meet the necessary criteria. When inspecting the properties which qualified for licensing, the number of tenants was recorded and advice provided regarding how many tenants the property could legally support in its current condition and if further amenities were installed. It was explained that landlords could qualify for a discount if they became a member of the London Landlords

Accredited Scheme, which encouraged landlords to adhere to set standards as well as providing them with further information.

There was discussion of the level of information available regarding HMOs, and members expressed the view that information which detailed HMOs in their own wards should be made available to all members of the Council. Steve Wilson agreed to make this information available to all members, although noted that this would be restricted to the mandatory (or three-storey) buildings only, given that the scale of the work necessary to include non-mandatory buildings would necessitate additional officers for whom there was no funding available for the foreseeable future. Members expressed disappointment at the funding situation and enquired whether any additional funding might become available. The Lead Member for Housing, Councillor Allie, was in agreement that it was a fundamental right that all people should be entitled to live in regulated, acceptable housing conditions but expressed regret that no further funding had been made available from central government to tackle this issue. Following further questions from members, Steve Wilson confirmed that in addition to the additional officer time required, agreement from the Secretary of State would also be required in order to establish a licensing scheme for two-storey buildings, as it would not be possible to institute such a scheme on a local basis only.

Members requested that further information be gathered which listed those two-storey properties in connection with which anti-social behaviour problems had been identified. Steve Wilson agreed to provide this information. Members also asked that the requested information be considered as an aspiration in policy terms and that the possibility of forming a pilot project to investigate the feasibility of regulating two-storey properties be explored. Councillor Allie also agreed to raise this matter with Martin Cheeseman, (Director, Housing and Community Care), in addition to discussing resource implications connected with publicising the existing scheme.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that a report with feedback on the information compiled on existing two-storey HMO properties be submitted to the Committee within the next twelve months.

## **7. Local Area Agreement – proposals 2008**

Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director, Policy) presented the report to members, which detailed the progress made in developing Brent's new Local Area Agreement (LAA) and provided further detail on the draft set of 35 improvement priorities which had been identified. She also spoke with regard to Brent's Borough Profile: the Evidence Base for the LAA and advised that, following consultation and negotiations with the Government Office for London

(GOL) overall agreement had been reached on the priorities. Members heard that final agreement would be established by June 2008.

The Committee discussed the proposals as well as proposed courses of action aimed at achievement of the 35 priorities. Cathy Tyson advised that some of the objectives linked closely with Primary Care Trust (PCT) objectives and would be achieved by working closely in partnership with the PCT, as well as promoting Council schemes aimed at lifestyle changes such as regular participation in healthy exercise. The Local Strategic Partnership would also be crucial to coordination and delivery of the targets. Some members questioned why some groups of children who belonged to ethnic minority backgrounds had been targeted by a joined up strategy to improve outcomes, when children belonging to other ethnic groups were also under achieving. It was explained that Somalian and African-Caribbean male children had been identified as being significantly behind, information which had been supported by the work of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny task group.

The view was expressed that the objective aimed at increasing the borough's housing stock contradicted the objective aimed at increasing job provision. Cathy Tyson explained that the issue in relation to job provision was not in relation to labour market volume; rather the strategy aimed to support people with training in order to access the jobs available. In response to further questions, Cathy Tyson advised that the 12 stretch targets included would be monitored closely to ensure all areas remained on target to achieve their objectives. In the event that any areas fell behind, a project plan would be requested to detail the plan for future progress and there remained the potential for sanctions, which included holding funds quarterly in arrears dependent on outcome.

The Chair thanked Cathy Tyson for the report and added that the Committee looked forward to receiving regular updates on future progress.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

## **8. Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act**

The Committee was invited to consider a briefing note, circulated separately, which outlined a number of issues related to local government which had arisen as a result of the Act. There was discussion of the proposed additional powers for Overview and Scrutiny committees, which included the power for all councillors to place items on meeting agendas, a requirement that lead members respond to the concerns of the Overview and Scrutiny committee; and a requirement that external partners supply information when requested by the Committee.

Jacqueline Casson (Senior Policy Officer) advised that a more detailed report containing suggestions as to how to take these proposals forward would be

brought to the next meeting. Members agreed to provide their views and suggestions outside of the meeting, and the Chair asked that consideration be given to training for members on how to deal with the extra powers to be given to Overview and Scrutiny committees.

RESOLVED:

that the briefing note be noted.

9. **Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would be re-arranged from Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2008 to a date to be confirmed.

10. **Any other urgent business**

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9:20 pm

L JONES  
Chair