

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28th May 2008 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Jones (Chair) and Councillors Castle (VC), Clues and R Moher.

There were apologies for absence from Councillors Mistry and Thomas.

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

There were none.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 25th March 2008 be received and approved as an accurate record subject to an amendment to the items resolved on page 8. It was agreed that (i) should be deleted and (ii) should be replaced with the following:

That the report of the Town Centre Regeneration task group be resubmitted to a future meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee accompanied by a response from the service and information on parking restrictions in and around town centres.

3. Matters Arising

Briefing Plan on Brent Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Asset Management Plan

The Chair informed Members that progress had been made with proposals to obtain a shop front counter service in Willesden.

Post Office Task Group Report

The Chair updated the Committee on the work of the Post Office task group since the Committee had considered the final report. It was noted that Postwatch had been impressed by the work carried out by the task group. However the Committee was advised that the Post Office would continue to pursue plans to close 6 branches in Brent in autumn 2008.

4. Deputations

There were none.

5. **Town Centre Regeneration Task Group Report**

The Committee considered the final report of the Town Centre Regeneration Task Group in Brent. Members were also provided with revised recommendations and were invited to comment.

The Chair discussed the principle issues affecting town centre regeneration as highlighted in the report. These included the impact of competition, changes in consumer patterns, accessibility, unattractiveness and levels of petty crime. It was also noted that the report emphasised the need to attract new businesses to town centres and to encourage smaller town centres to focus on specialist outlets.

The Committee further discussed possibilities for regenerating town centres in Brent such as by having pedestrian areas. The Town Centre Manager for Wembley advised that pedestrianisation was expensive, however there were plans for this on part of Wembley High Road. It was further noted that The Quintain developments in Wembley provided the main opportunities for town centre improvements in the Wembley area.

In response to further questions, the Committee was advised that there were processes in place for coordination with other developments. Osita Udenson (Wembley Town Centre Manager) and Samuel Caldbeck (Willesden & Harlesden Town Centre Manager) both commented that they attended the Cricklewood Partnership along with Brent Council Planning Policy officers to ensure that Brent's views were incorporated in plans for the development of Cricklewood. Michael Read (Assistant Director, Policy and Regulation) also advised the Committee that the London Plan provided the main strategic framework for town centre development.

Irfan Malik (Assistant Director, Streets and Transportation) asked about the recommendations of the Highways Committee with regard to Town Centre Management. The Chair explained that as these recommendations were made subsequent to the task group presenting their final report, they were too late to be considered in the final recommendations. However it was noted that the Streets and Transportation would follow up on the Highways recommendations and it was further suggested that this could be addressed by the Council's Parking Strategy.

With regard to timescales for seeing the implementation of the task group's recommendations, the Chair advised that the recommendations would be tracked and it was envisioned that progress would be made within the following six months.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the Town Centre Regeneration task group's revised recommendations be endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- (ii) that the task group's recommendations be forwarded to the Executive;

- (iii) that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should receive a progress report regarding the task groups recommendation in six months time.

6. **Update on the recommendations of the Voluntary Sector Task Group.**

Mike Bibby (Strategy Planning and Performance Manager, Housing & Community Care) presented the report that provided an update on the implementation of the Voluntary Sector Task Groups recommendations. Mike Bibby explained that of the 12 recommendations made 11 had been wholly or partially implemented. It was noted that the recommendation relating to additional funds for capacity building to help the development of voluntary and community sector groups, had not been implemented as no additional funds could be made available. There followed discussion about capacity building and the need to meet emerging demands. The Strategy Planning and Performance Manager explained that there was an allocated fund for this and it was noted that the process for administering this was flexible enough to enable the service to meet emerging needs and changing priorities.

The Committee also noted that the Housing & Community Care Department had recruited to the new post of Head of Service Commissioning & Development. Mike Bibby explained that the post holder would be responsible for voluntary sector funding and would be starting in summer 2008. Noting the deadlines for implementing the task group's recommendation, the Chair suggested that the Committee receive an update on their implementation early in 2009.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the update on the implementation of the task groups recommendations be noted;
- (ii) that the Committee should receive a final briefing on the implementation of the task group's recommendation early in 2009.

7. **Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Committee considered the report setting out options for the Overview & Scrutiny work programme for 2008/09. The Chair began by explaining the procedures for establishing a task group and noted that there were formal procedures for doing so. Noting that a Member of the Council had proposed that a task group investigate the Legal Service Commission reforms, the Chair introduced Jas Yembra (Procurement and Contract Monitoring officer, Housing Needs) who was present to discuss this issue.

Members heard that as a result of the aforementioned reforms, legal practitioners would be paid a nationally agreed fixed rate instead of being paid by the hour. This new arrangement had been in place since October 2007 and it was suggested that this was impacting on voluntary sector legal advice providers in local authorities. Jas Yembra explained that specific concerns in Brent included that the borough's growing population with diverse language needs were reflected in the length of time taken over cases. Thus with practitioners being paid a fixed fee there was a resulting pay deficit. Noting

that the reforms were currently subject to judicial review in a case brought by the law society, Jas Yembra suggested that a task group could look into whether the reforms were having an adverse effect on the borough which could in turn inform any future considerations for national policy change.

The possible impact of these reforms on residents' access to legal services was discussed. It was suggested that such reforms could impact on residents' civil liberties if it were found that the time constraints were influencing the legal advice being offered. The Director of Policy and Regeneration emphasised that a task group should focus on the possible impact on residents rather than focus on highly specialist policy issues. He also highlighted that this was a London-wide issue and suggested that other London boroughs could be contacted to find out more with regard to their approach to the issue. The Chair also suggested that the Committee should wait until the Assistant Director for Housing Needs could provide a detailed briefing on the issue before Members decide whether to further investigate. It was noted that the briefing should cover the issues raised to show how the reforms could impact on residents and discuss the possible impact of the task group's findings.

Jacqueline Casson (Senior Policy Officer) continued by introducing the Committee's work programme and inviting Members to raise any issues they would like for the Committee to consider in the coming year. It was noted that the leader of the Council would be present at the next meeting to discuss with the Committee the Council's plans for the year ahead. Members suggested that the Committee would be better equipped to raise issues for consideration following the Leader's presentation.

The Chair highlighted that as well as setting up task groups, the Committee would consider alternative ways of working in order to encourage participation from more members of the Committee. It was noted that members would be invited to visit adult day care centres before considering the issue of 'Adult Social Care Transformation' in October 2008. The Senior Policy Officer also noted that the Committee would be considering the issue of recycling in July, and suggested that following this, some Members could carry out a short piece of work on best practice in recycling.

It was asked whether Members could be provided with information relating to how the Committee's work linked in with the Council's corporate strategy. The Jacqueline Casson noted that this would be demonstrated in the annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. However it was agreed that further information could be provided to show how the issues in the work programme related to themes within the corporate strategy.

The Chair advised that the item on the 'Members' Role in Financial Governance' would be removed from the work programme as it was felt that it would be more appropriate for this issue to be considered by the Performance and Finance Select Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the Committee should receive a detailed briefing on the Legal Service Commission Reforms with information on how other London Borough's approached this issue and a discussion of what could be achieved by a task group;
- (ii) that the work programme be noted and the items for the next agenda be agreed.

8. Discussion on Members' Development

Members were invited to discuss the development opportunities that would be useful in relation to their role on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Noting that there was a training session arranged especially for Overview & Scrutiny Members in July, members suggested that further training needs could be identified as a consequence. The Chair encouraged Members to attend the session on the 21st July.

RESOLVED:

That the Member Development session on the 21st July be noted and further recommendations for training be considered at a later date.

9. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 22nd July 2008.

10. Any other urgent business

There was none.

The meeting ended at 8.25pm

L JONES

Chair