

## **MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**22<sup>nd</sup> July 2008 at 7.30 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Jones (Chair) and Councillors Castle (Vice Chair), Clues, Mrs Fernandes (for Mistry), Leaman, R Moher, HB Patel and Thomas.

There were apologies for absence from Councillor Mistry.

Councillors Dunn and Lorber also attended the meeting.

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

There were none.

### **2. Minutes of Previous Meetings**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meetings held on 19<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> May 2008 be received and approved as accurate records

### **3. Matters Arising**

There were none

### **4. Appointments to sub-committees**

RESOLVED:-

That the following appointments be made:

Forward Plan Select Committee

Councillor Long to be appointed chair in place of Councillor Coughlin  
Councillor Tancred to replace Councillor Green

Health Select Committee

Councillor J Moher to replace Councillor Fox as 1<sup>st</sup> alternate for Councillor Powney  
Councillor Bacchus to replace Councillor Fox as 1<sup>st</sup> alternate for Councillor Moher  
Councillor Jones as 1<sup>st</sup> alternate to Councillor Crane

### **5. Deputations**

There were none.

## 6. **Leader update on the Administration's priorities**

The Leader of the Council had been asked to attend the Committee to provide an update on the Administration's priorities for the year ahead and thereby help develop the relationship between the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny. Councillor Lorber outlined the four key themes for the Administration; crime and community safety – dealing with the fear of crime, maximising investment in additional Police Community Support Teams, enhancement of the use of cctv, working with the police in dealing with those crimes that caused the greatest concern such as violent crime, robbery, use of guns and knives. Taking preventative action to tackle alcohol and drug abuse and support young people within dysfunctional family environments and those out of work. Regeneration – seek to reduce the pockets of high unemployment in the borough's most deprived neighbourhoods, offer assistance with training opportunities in key areas of the borough where local people could benefit from major regeneration schemes, developing a comprehensive scheme to regenerate the residential areas around the North Circular Road and addressing issues such as the health impact on those living in proximity of the road, improving housing conditions and maximising the beneficial effects of the proximity of the Welsh Harp and Wembley. Young people – in recognition that safety is the number one issue raised by young people working with schools to improve safety. listening to what young people in the borough want from the Council and listening to the views of the Brent Youth Parliament, working on the extended schools programme and continuing to support schools in this, encouraging the continuing improvement of schools in the borough. Sustainability – working towards making this part of everything the Council does. The challenge of increasing recycling rates to 40% by the year 2010, cutting CO2 emissions by 20% by 2011, producing a green travel plan, positioning the Council to lead by example and encourage a cultural change in the borough towards sustainability issues, ensuring the new civic centre is a major contributor towards the target for cutting existing CO2 emissions and achieve an excellent design standard for the building, seek to improve public transport.

Councillor Lorber stated that the underlying key message he wanted to get across was that the Council was embarking on a major improvement programme. The Council had been consistently recognised as a good council rated as having excellent prospects but it was time to challenge the authority to reach a level of excellence. He was pleased with the progress made by the present Administration over the last two years and stated that this could be seen in the cleaner streets, increased recycling rates, new Kingsbury Library, with the Harlesden Library rebuild underway and the improvements to the Neasden Library in the pipeline. Action continued to be taken to tackle the shortage of school places in the borough. Crime levels were down but more needed to be done. Progress was being made in undertaking the regeneration of the borough with those areas best served by public transport being a priority for action. Other factors to take account of were the impact of the credit crunch and the Council's transformation programmes. Councillor Lorber stated that in the end the ultimate test would be the level of participation and satisfaction of residents in the borough.

The Chair asked what Councillor Lorber considered to be the key challenges facing the Administration. Councillor Lorber replied that these were to meet the demand for school places, the continued regeneration of the borough despite the credit crunch and to change people's habits on environmental issues.

In answer to a question around how the large amount of private housing around the North Circular Road could be included in any regeneration plans, Councillor Lorber stated that attempts would be made to engage with the private sector with the possibility of identifying partners that the council could work with to regenerate the area, however he commented that there were still a substantial amount of Council properties in the area. He admitted it presented challenges but felt the Council owed it to the people living on or close to the North Circular Road to improve their quality of life.

Whilst acknowledging the need to improve the physical environment, Councillor Lorber was asked what else was being done to improve the lives of people. He replied that a substantial part of the Council's allocation from the new Government grant that had replaced the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund was being put into the Church End area to support people getting back into work. He added that this was a need that was well recognised by the Administration.

The comment was made that there was little mention in the Administration's priorities of looked after children and plans to improve the service. Councillor Lorber responded by saying that there was already work being carried out in this area for instance to improve education attainment and identifying where additional support was needed.

Referring to the concept of extended schools, Councillor Lorber answered a question on this by explaining that work was being done to establish core locations in the borough where the availability of school premises was most needed. It would be necessary to establish some revenue funding to make the hire of such accommodation more affordable to local groups. Reference was made to the findings of the task group on increasing participation in sports and the recognition that school facilities were being wasted in part because they were too expensive for local groups or people to hire. Councillor Lorber confirmed that this was an area being looked at; he stated that the design of the new Wembley Academy would be based on sharing facilities and he hoped a similar approach could be adopted with the rebuilding of the John Kelly schools.

The issue of the fear of crime was raised and what was being done to support known families with problems to prevent the situations getting worse. Councillor Lorber indicated that this was a major priority for the Local Area Agreement. The Committee was informed of a very successful pilot project that had put in place a common assessment programme for identifying children with particular needs so as resources could be targeted. This had already produced some good outcomes and had to be dealt with in a partnership approach.

A link was made between regeneration and the development of the library service and Councillor Lorber was asked to comment on this. He responded by saying that when the Town Hall building was vacated upon the opening of the new Civic Centre a new library would be provided. The experience of opening the new Kingsbury Library had shown what effect this could have. There were other locations in the borough where improved library facilities were being provided. Referring to the New Deal for Communities in South Kilburn, Councillor Lorber stated that it had been believed that the project would encompass allied improvements to the area beyond just housing but that this was not now the case. He was not happy with this and had asked that this situation be looked at again. He referred to the Wembley area where there were many other developments taking place in addition to providing additional housing.

With reference to the targets for recycling there was some discussion over the level of access people had to the green box scheme across the borough. Councillor Lorber stated that he was confident a scheme could be achieved based on 98% of properties in the borough being provided with a green box.

The Committee reflected on the discussion and felt that there were a lot of big issues raised in the Leader's contribution. As a way of keeping track with how the Council was performing in these areas, Members agreed to ask the Leader back in 6 months time to report on progress on achieving the stated aims of the Administration. The Leader indicated he would be happy to do this.

The Chair thanked Councillor Lorber for his attendance.

**RESOLVED:-**

that the priorities of the Administration as submitted to the Committee by the Leader be noted and the Leader be invited to report back to the Committee in six months time on the progress made and challenges facing the Council.

## **7. Local Strategic Partnership Annual Report**

The Committee considered the first annual report on the work of Partners for Brent, Brent's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The report set out the partnership's achievements and developments during 2006-7 and 2007-8. The Leader of the Council was invited to comment on the report. Councillor Lorber stated that the Primary Care Trust now had a new Chief Executive and Chair who he had met recently and the Council was close to reaching a final agreement with the trust. He was confident that the financial situation of the trust was improving and there had been some acknowledgment that the cuts imposed had gone too far. The meeting had agreed that the trust and the Council should work together to improve relations and be more effective. The LSP comprised other partner agencies including the voluntary sector but it was the Council that was very much the lead body.

The Committee was informed by Cathy Tyson, Assistant Director of Policy and Regeneration that there were 80 or 90 partnerships operating under the LSP but that

the key ones were crime and community safety, health and social care, employer, children and young people, sustainability and sports and culture. The work of these featured in the annual report. The main activities of the LSP over the last year had been reviewing the governance arrangements for the various partnerships and delivering on the 12 stretch targets included in the Council's Local Area Agreement (LAA). In addition, the LSP had developed a new LAA comprising 35 local improvement priorities. A shared performance management approach to these was being rolled out to partners. Other notable achievements had been a 21% decrease in crime, increased number of young people taking part in sporting activity, developing the employer partnership and producing a health and well being strategy.. Cathy Tyson stated that the LSP was becoming increasingly central to addressing the really challenging issues facing the borough as reflected in the recent Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act. The Local Government Act also imposed a duty on partners to co-operate with the work of Overview and Scrutiny.

The Chair asked which stretch target had not been met and was informed that this was the smoking cessation programme which had been cut as part of the cutbacks caused by the PCT funding crisis.

A question was asked on how improved outcomes for young people could be seen and evidenced. Cathy Tyson replied that there was already a lot of evidence to show how this was working in educational outcomes, which was one of the 12 stretch targets. The prime aim of the partnership was how to prevent children becoming looked after.

Reference was made to the prominence of involving local people within the new Comprehensive Area Assessment regime and how the Council was meeting this challenge. It was explained that efforts were being made to involve people more in local specific projects. The Sustainability Forum had a good level of representation on it from local people. A lot of work had been undertaken with BrAVA to support their representation on the LSP.

The Chair concluded that the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee might want to take a closer look at the outcomes of the young people's partnership and progress on this and other priority areas for the LSP could be reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 6 months time. Otherwise it was a matter of concern that the target on smoking cessation would not be met and consequently would lose the Council some funding.

## **8. Increasing participation in sport through sports clubs**

The Committee considered the final report of the task group on increasing participation in sport through sports clubs. The Chair of the task group, Councillor Mrs Fernandes introduced the report and explained that the task group found itself looking beyond just sports clubs to include how voluntary and community groups could be supported to provide opportunities for increasing participation. Statistics produced by Sport England showed that only 20.6% of Brent residents were a member of a sports club compared to

a London average of 26.2%. The task group looked at targeting specific sports into areas where it was felt the people would most likely be interested in that sport.

The Lead Service Officer was unable to be present at the meeting but had submitted her response to the recommendations of the task group which was tabled. Councillor Mrs Fernandes thanked her fellow councillors on the task group for their work and Jacqueline Casson for her support.

In agreeing the recommendations of the task group, the Chair pointed out that the recommendation that the Primary Care Trust should reinstate targeting those groups least likely to exercise should be referred to the Health Select Committee to pursue.

RESOLVED:

that the recommendations of the Increasing Participation in Sport through Sports Clubs task group be agreed and referred to the Executive for endorsement.

## 9. **Increasing participation in recycling in Brent**

In its final report for 2007/8 the Budget Panel recommended:

*That the further provision of recycling facilities should be considered alongside the introduction of compulsory waste recycling as a way of increasing recycling rates and reducing waste going to land-fill*

There was particular concern that the lack of recycling facilities in some properties in the borough, particularly flats (and HMOs), would hinder progress.

Consequently the Committee had before it a report regarding the barriers to achieving higher participation in recycling and composting services in Brent and seeking a view on whether further activity should be undertaken to look at best practice in improving participation rates elsewhere and report back to the Committee's meeting in October 2008.

Keith Balmer, Director of StreetCare, introduced the item by stating that the aim was to provide access to some sort of recycling facility to all properties in the borough. The initial response to the leaflet issued had been very encouraging with a huge increase in requests for boxes. The need now was to encourage people to use the facilities and increase the tonnage collected.

The point was put that the message most people had received from the publicity was that they would be fined if they did not participate in the scheme. There was a fear that bins left out for collection would be contaminated and the owners fined when it was not their fault. In reply Keith Balmer stated that there was no problem in issuing the boxes and that he was aware of the risk of people's rubbish being added to by others. The service would not adopt a heavy handed approach to fining people but rather would seek to encourage them to use the facilities.

It was felt that some further work on investigating best practice elsewhere might be useful but that a full task group for this work was not necessary.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that a 'spotlight' on best practice in other boroughs in providing recycling facilities on housing estates, houses in multiple occupation, flats above shops etc be undertaken by Councillors Clues, HB Patel and Thomas;
- (ii) that a scope for this piece of work be drawn up and presented to the members named.

#### 10. **Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2007/08**

The Committee considered its Annual Report which reflected the work of all of the committees/sub-committees within Brent's overview and scrutiny structure.

It was reported that Members had identified a need for a communication strategy for overview and scrutiny. The Communications Unit would be asked to publicise aspects of the annual report and it had been suggested that the chairs of all the overview and scrutiny bodies should meet twice annually to co-ordinate their work. The comment was made that it was not easy for Members of one committee/sub-committee to keep abreast of what the other committees/sub-committees were doing. The Chair reminded the Committee that she regularly reported to Council on the activities of overview and scrutiny.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2007/08 be agreed;
- (ii) that the Chair be requested to ensure that her report to Council on the activities of Overview and Scrutiny includes as much information as possible.

#### 11. **Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme**

The Committee considered options for its work programme, including considering the request that further work be undertaken on investigating the Legal Service Commission reforms relating to the introduction of the unified contracts.

The Chair raised the item on the Legal Services Commission and referred to the briefing note attached as Appendix C to the work programme. Councillor Jones stated that as this was a national programme the Council would have limited influence over it. The question was asked whether there was enough advice provision in the Borough to meet the needs, especially in light of the credit crunch. It was suggested that the Committee could be informed of the progress of actual cases and how they might have benefited under the new scheme. In answer to a question, Perry Singh, Assistant Director Housing Needs/Private Sector, explained that officers had met with the advice agencies

in the borough and they had different experiences of the changes. They were restructuring themselves in order to maximize their resources.

The Chair raised an item referred to her by Councillor Powney for possible further investigation. It concerned looking at how Anti Social Behavior policy was determined, the principles under which the powers were used, the scale of use and how other London Councils used their powers. The Chair stated that there was not the resources available at the present time to create another task group and it was therefore agreed to ask for a report back on the issue at the Committee's next meeting.

The Committee was informed that the Budget Panel had asked that a task group be established to consider the issue of staff car parking. It was felt that this was premature in advance of the Council's travel plan (and parking strategy) being published but that the matter would be kept under review.

**RESOLVED:-**

- (i) that the Committee be advised in 3 or 4 months of the impact of the changes on individuals and the outcome of the reviews being carried out by the Law Society;
- (ii) that the questions raised by Councillor Powney regarding Anti Social Behaviour policy be addressed in a report back to the next meeting of the Committee;
- (iii) that the Leader of the Council be requested to provide an update on the production of the Council's travel plan when he next addresses the Committee (see minute 6 above);
- (iv) that the work programme for 2008/09 be agreed.

**12. Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2008.

**13. Any other urgent business**

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.35pm

L JONES  
Chair