

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 October 2008 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Jones (Chair), Councillor Castle (Vice Chair), and Councillors Leaman and Thomas.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Colwill (Lead Member for Adults, Health & Social Care), Councillor Dunwell (part), Detective Sergeant Cordilia Greenaway-Harvey and Detective Inspector Darren Montgomery (Metropolitan Police), Ann O'Neill (Brent Association for Voluntary Action – BrAVA) and Parin Robbins (NHS Brent).

Apologies for absence were given on behalf of Councillors Clues and H B Patel.

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

None declared.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meetings**

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2008 be approved as an accurate record.

3. **Matters Arising**

None.

4. **Safeguarding Adults – Annual Report 2007/08**

Christabel Shawcross (Assistant Director, Community Care) introduced the fourth annual report of the Brent Safeguarding Adults Committee. The report outlined national developments and progress made in Brent during 2007/08. It also identified key issues and future plans for growth and improvement, and reported on the outcome of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) on Independence, Well-being and Choice.

Councillor Colwill (Lead Member for Adults, Health & Social Care) drew members' attention to the positive comments in the CSCI inspection report, as well as the need to continue to make improvements in the context of a strong multi-agency approach. Christabel Shawcross informed members that in addition to the three-year strategic action plan there was a separate action plan in response to the CSCI report, and this would be reported to the Executive at an appropriate point. She drew members' attention to the fact that the inspection report had commented on the positive effect of Overview and Scrutiny and the strength of multi-agency partnership work. Christabel Shawcross took full responsibility for a weakness in reporting highlighted during the inspection and she informed members that this issue was covered in the robust action

plan. She added that the area of investigating cases relating to vulnerable adults was very complex, and that only one authority in 10 had done well by CSCI standards.

Asked about the effectiveness of the protocol on domestic violence referrals and the quality of referrals in general, Detective Sergeant Cordilia Greenaway-Harvey informed the Committee that referrals mainly related to older people's services and that the quality of the referral was inevitably affected by the person making it. With a view to improving the quality of referrals, talks had taken place between the police and the Council on the extent to which anyone who had made a referral could be contacted without prejudicing the case. Ann O'Neill (BrAVA) confirmed from her experience at Mencap that follow-up was often needed before proper information was obtained, and she informed members that voluntary sector workers were encouraged to take the cases to the Council.

The Chair suggested that it might be useful for Councillors to have a briefing in order to raise their awareness of abuse of vulnerable adults when dealing with members of the public.

Asked about statistics showing the ethnicity of vulnerable older people, Christabel Shawcross reported that the figures were consistent with the number and ethnic origin of older people in the community. She added that the CSCI report had praised the quantitative monitoring in place, but that the challenge was how best to use the data. Members pointed out that some data sets in the report were incomplete and some were unclear. For example, in relation to the outcome of referrals, 'no further action' was often a good outcome, but this had not been made clear in the report. Sarah McDermott (Safeguarding Adults Co-ordinator) reported that the Council was looking to record the outcome of referrals differently in future.

In answer to a question about possible shortfalls in mental health funding as a consequence of the financial crisis, Christabel Shawcross informed members that in terms of overall safeguarding, funding had not affected what could be done. Parin Robbins (NHS Brent) reported year on year growth in this area, which was an ongoing priority for Brent. Asked about hospital discharge arrangements, Parin Robbins reported that huge improvements had been made, and that this was a high priority for both the Council and NHS Brent, working together. Regular meetings took place, and reports were made on a daily basis of any delays, the number of which had continued to go down.

In a discussion about priorities for the coming year, Sarah McDermott reported that the Council would be working with carers and carrying out training to ensure that practice reflected changes in policy and procedures.

Members discussed the possibility of an increase in financial abuse as a consequence of the roll-out of direct payments. Christabel Shawcross informed the Committee that officers were aware of this as an issue and were taking it very seriously. The aim was to ensure that there would be a competent person to help anyone unable to deal with

direct payments themselves. There was also an independent agency to help people with this. The Council required evidence of how money was being spent and in general only family members not on the premises were eligible for payment. The sensible use of bank accounts was one way of preventing financial abuse. Ann O'Neill added that the new system would empower those in receipt of direct payments. Members agreed that the Council needed to be vigilant to close any loopholes quickly, and Christabel Shawcross reported the Council's auditors and anti-fraud team would have an action plan to prevent fraud, crime and any abuse of money.

Councillor Colwill informed members that a DVD had been made about direct payments, and that this was being shown at voluntary sector meetings. The Chair thanked Councillor Colwill for attending as Lead Member.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that the Committee be briefed on the multi-agency protocol at a future meeting;
- (iii) that a briefing be arranged for Councillors on awareness of signs of abuse in constituents;
- (iv) that consideration be given to a more meaningful use of statistics in future reports;
- (v) that an update on the action plan be brought to the Committee in spring 2009.

5. Consultation on Modernising Learning Disabilities Day Services

The Committee had received a report setting out details of the consultation on modernising learning disabilities day services. Christabel Shawcross introduced the report and updated members on progress. She reported that the original consultation was on a proposed change from three day centre bases to two, with additional outreach facilities. The issues raised resulted in strong objections from carers and users, both to the proposals and the way in which the consultation had been carried out. Two carers had made a formal complaint, which had then become the subject of an external investigation. Recommendations were made as a result of the investigation, and an action plan had been drawn up. However, the complainants were dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation, and had moved to the next stage, a further external investigation. The Council was now listening more intently, with the consultation in a different format. Answering questions from members, Christabel Shawcross recognised that there was a lack of confidence and trust in the process as a result of the perceived failure of the first stage, but she emphasised that the Council was now trying to be clearer and more open, and the next phase of consultation would be agreed with the Learning Disability Partnership Board. Christabel Shawcross informed members that the lessons learnt from the experience

of this consultation included the need to be more systematic when consulting and to distinguish between the needs of carers and users in encouraging carers to help the people they cared for to have more fulfilling lives.

The Chair thanked Christabel Shawcross for her report. Members were grateful that errors had been recognised and changes made.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that an update be presented to the Committee in spring 2009;
- (iii) that a day-time visit to Strathcona Learning Disability Day Centre be organised for the Committee, to include the possibility of a visit to a project;
- (iv) that the possibility of inviting a carers' representative to meet with the Committee be explored.

6. Direct Payments and Self-Directed Support

The Committee considered a report setting out information on direct payments and self-directed support, a new way of delivering social care which seeks to give service users more control. Christabel Shawcross informed members that one of the initiatives taken to increase the take-up of direct payments had been the production of a DVD showing direct payments users, promotional material and training. This would be shown to the Committee members during the agreed visit to Strathcona day centre. It was also suggested that a copy of the DVD be provided for each political group, to be available for all Councillors to borrow from the group office.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that a short workshop on direct payments and self-directed support be combined with the agreed visit to Strathcona Day Centre;
- (ii) that copies of the DVD be made available to each political group office.

7. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task Group and Review Updates

The Committee had received a report updating members on the work of the current review and task groups. Councillor Leaman reported that members of the task group looking at public transport access to health sites in Brent had held a programme of meetings and visits to gather evidence. The work of the task group was drawing to a close, and it would report to the Committee in December 2008. Councillor Leaman reported that members of the task group were concerned that the issue of public access to health sites needed to be considered in advance of the reorganisation of the health service in London, as difficulty of access affected the take-up of services.

Councillor Thomas, who was taking part in the review looking at increasing the participation of flats in recycling, reported that two meetings had been held and visits had been made to sites in the borough to look at current practice. He reported that, while good progress had been made on the St Raphael's estate, this was not the case elsewhere, and it was felt currently that with the current level of resources it would be difficult to be more proactive in increasing the recycling level of flat-dwellers. Members of the review group were also looking at good practice in other boroughs.

Jacqueline Casson (Senior Policy Officer, Policy and Regeneration) informed members that the task group looking at climate change would report to the Committee early in 2009.

RESOLVED:

that the report and members' comments be noted.

8. Feedback from the Scrutiny Chairs' Meeting

Members had received a report providing feedback from the most recent meeting of Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, held on 11 September 2008. Topics discussed at the meeting had included proposals for a Councillor Call for Action protocol to comply with new legislation (the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007), and a draft protocol had been provided to members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration. Responding to Councillor Dunwell's concern that the protocol was proscriptive in suggesting that Councillors should ensure that they had raised any issue through the neighbourhood working process before invoking a Councillor Call for Action, members agreed that there needed to be a filter process. Jacqueline Casson informed members that involvement in the neighbourhood working process was just one of several criteria already agreed by the Committee in relation to the proposed protocol.

RESOLVED:

that the report and members' comments be noted.

9. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on 10 December 2008.

10. Any Other Urgent Business

None.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm.

L JONES
Chair