

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 March 2009 at 7.30pm

PRESENT: Councillor Jones (Chair), Councillor Castle (Vice Chair), and Councillors Arnold (for R Moher), Mistry and Thomas.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R Moher and HB Patel.

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

None declared.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meetings**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 10th February 2009 be approved as an accurate record.

3. **Matters Arising**

Update from the Leader of the Council on the Administration's priorities

As a prelude to a briefing from the Leader of the Council in six months time, the Chair informed members that Graham Ellis, Director of Business Transformation, would be invited to a future meeting to provide insight into his newly created role within the Council, and an update on the approach being adopted to the 70 improvement projects that had been identified.

4. **Appointments to Sub-Committees**

None

5. **Increasing Participation in Sports through Sports Clubs**

Gerry Kiefer (Head of Sports Services) introduced the report which provided an update on the implementation of the Increasing Participation in Sport through Sports Clubs task group recommendations. In taking the Committee through each of the recommendations, she informed Members that implementation of a number of them relied on extra resources being identified and because the service had had to make savings as part of the Council's budget making process this meant that alternative means of funding were necessary. The service was always looking for opportunities to attract extra resources. She added that recommendation 1 regarding the use of

Mosaic based data was a priority for the sports service. In answer to a question regarding the co-ordination of funding to sports clubs, the Committee was advised that the Sports Development Manager met regularly with the Neighbourhood Working Manager to ensure coordination of the Council's support to any clubs seeking such support. External partnerships with Harrow Council and community sports groups were also being explored to develop opportunities for sports and physical activity throughout the borough. Partnerships were identified as important owing to some sports clubs in Brent being located on the boundary of the borough and also serving neighbouring boroughs. The short listing of AFC Wembley as Pro Active's Club of the year the result of which would be known by 27 March 2009, was cited as a positive example of progress in the Council's sports development efforts.

In addressing a Committee question as to how resources were apportioned across the various sports, and the suggestion that there was a lack of a clear strategy for providing additional sport centres in the borough, Gerry Kiefer informed the Committee that a recent survey of 20,000 young people in Brent had revealed sports such as swimming, cricket and horse riding to be particularly popular. However the most popular clubs in the borough were football and cricket clubs. It was pointed out that there was a lack of facilities to develop some sports activities. Priority was being given to providing an additional swimming pool, which it was hoped would include some ancillary sports facility, but there was a need for more pitches for some sports activities such as cricket and additional resources to bring them up to standard. A facility strategy developed in November 2008 was additionally being used as a guide for developing sports facilities based on population distribution within the borough.

Referencing the pending 2012 Olympics the Committee asked of efforts being made to encourage the participation of Brent residents, especially the young, in joining in sport. It also noted with concern the high cost of using school sports facilities such as those at Willesden Sports Academy. Addressing the issues, Gerry Kiefer explained that the Council could not use its influence to reduce the cost to the public of using school facilities because schools were not allowed to subsidise commercial lets. However the use of planning Section 106 monies was a priority for sport provision and there was encouragement that when schools developed new sports facilities that they made them available for use by the community. She pointed out that although user fees were likely to be increased by 5% in the next financial year, Willesden Sports Centre and Vale Farm Sports Centre were also being reviewed to determine if a talented resident athletes scheme could be developed affording talented athletes reduced costs to access training facilities.

Referring to the past hosting of a sporting event for disabled people, it was felt that the return of such an event would be good for sport in the borough. Gerry Kiefer explained that past staging of this event had been expensive, with the costs borne entirely by the Council. The present budget therefore made these events cost prohibitive. However Willesden Sports Centre was AFI fitness certified and provided an opportunity for engaging disabled people in sports and physical activity and its use for this purpose would be further explored.

In concluding, Gerry Kiefer stressed that all the task group recommendations were important since none of them stood alone. Experience had also revealed that securing

volunteers for sports development had been challenging for clubs who were reliant on a small number of people to do a large number of things. The prediction was however made that the onset of the 2012 Olympics would bring about a greater spirit of willingness to volunteer.

The Chair thanked Gerry Kiefer for her presentation indicating that it was good to receive such a report that tracked progress of the task group recommendations. She stated that the task group recommendations had been sound, and noted that they were ongoing. The Committee had strongly supported greater use of open spaces, and resources to ensure they were of a good standard. The thorny problem of public access to school sports facilities and the inability of schools to subsidise use was acknowledged, but encouragement given to identify avenues that enhanced public access to facilities. Support was also given to the resurrection of some form of disabled games event, whilst acknowledging that this could not be supported by the borough alone. A request was made for the Committee to be presented with an update in the next six months of progress in implementing the task group recommendations, and hope voiced that funding for implementation of all the recommendations would be secured.

RESOLVED:-

that the Head of Sports Services be invited to report back to the Committee in six months on implementation of recommendations made by the Increasing Participation in Sports Through Sports Clubs task group.

6. **Update on Learning Disabilities Day Centres Consultation**

Lance Douglas (Assistant Director, Quality and Support) introduced the report. He informed the committee that although an analytical report to the Brent Learning Disabilities Partnership Board (BLDPB) of the assessments had been delayed, this was due to the delicate and complex nature of the 400 assessments being carried out. It was committed that the report would be finalized by the end of July, and thereafter could be presented to Committee. In the meantime an interim report was before the Committee for information. Lance Douglas stated that very positive feedback had been received following the member level visit to the Strathcona Day Care Centre and that this provided an opportunity for members to get more involved in the provision of the service.

Lance Douglas pointed out that feedback from the consultation exercise would be applied when considering changes in the service. The consultation exercise had shown that carers and users were fearful of change regarding respite care. This had led to a change of approach from considering the closure of day centres to alternative means of matching the feedback from the consultation to the provision of the service. Two new sites had therefore been identified for the relocation of the Albert Road day centre and ASSPECTS, and a final decision on which of these should be chosen was awaited. Lance Douglas added that there were significant financial constraints within

which the service would need to operate in the future and that some difficult decisions would have to be taken concerning the future of day care provision.

The Chair thanked Lance Douglas for his report and requested that the outcome of the consultation be reported back to the Committee in September 2009. She stated that it was important that the views of the carers were taken into account because they provided such a valuable resource. It was agreed that once the assessments had been completed a follow up visit by Members should be arranged to build on the positive results of the initial visit.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that a report of the outcome of the assessments be presented to the Committee in September 2009;
- (ii) that a follow up visit to Strathcona Day Centre be arranged for Members of the Committee.

7. **One Stop Service Redesign Update**

Sandra Walker (Assistant Director, Customer Services) updated Members on the progress on implementing the Council's One Stop Service Redesign Project. She drew attention to the success of the Kingsbury Library Plus "pilot" reflected by the increased user demand and how this experience was being used to roll out other proposed contact points across the borough. Sandra Walker went through the report before the Committee in detail, pointing out that the intention currently was that Willesden would be retained as the One Stop Service's principle south of borough provision even after the opening of the new provision within the new Civic Centre in 2013.

In answer to a question concerning the collocation of the One Stop Service with the Library service in some areas, Sandra Walker stated that she felt the arrangement worked well. However as demand changed so resources would have to be redirected but as the Council moved into 2009/10 the level of staff resources would remain stable. She added that other partnerships such as with children centres were also being explored.

Explaining to the Committee the Kingsbury Library overspend, Sandra Walker pointed out that in using the lessons learnt on this scheme savings had been made on other parts of the redesign project which more than compensated for the overspend. The library's modernization which had had the effect of increasing user contacts was referred to as a lesson learnt in redesign. Another lesson identified as having been learnt was that one size does not fit all. Confidence was expressed in savings being achieved as planned.

The Committee noted that the report and its presentation had given a very positive picture of the One Stop Service's operations and had not identified any possible shortcoming in the redesign project. It was enquired as to how success was measured in service provision, and what plans existed for an anticipated increase in user demand associated with the economic recession including a returning demand for face to face

contacts. In response, Sandra Walker and Patricia McFarlane (Head of One Stop Service Operations) who was also in attendance, explained that the redesign project was proving to be successful, and although it was difficult to predict future needs, use of the service was monitored closely. They further informed Members that the redesign project had been in response to past decreases in demand for face to face contact but that the service was conscious of the possible service demand impact of the recession. In concluding their presentation, the Committee was assured that face to face contact would always be made available to those who needed it most with the retention of four drop in centres. Neasden because of its particular demography was identified as an area that could potentially be a reflection of what was required in communities trying to cope with the recession.

The Chair thanked the presenters for their report and expressed satisfaction that prior concerns regarding One Stop Service's operations were being addressed through the redesign project. Continued concern still remained regarding the impact of the recession on Brent residents. Following up this concern, the Committee requested that in three months time, an update be provided detailing user contacts received by the One Stop Service, including the nature of enquiries, and of increases and decreases in particular service uses. A further request was made that this be widened to include enquiries related to school places.

RESOLVED:-

that a report be presented to Committee in three month's time providing a further update on the redesign programme and including an analysis of the range of issues being dealt with by the One Stop Service.

8. Local Impact of the Recession

Phil Newby (Director, Policy and Regeneration) introduced his report on the impact of the economic recession on Brent. He informed the Committee that a similar report had been submitted to the Council's Executive. Phil Newby highlighted the report's conclusion that it was too early to draw a conclusion on the impact of the recession on the borough. The Executive had therefore instructed that the situation be rigorously monitored and quarterly reports provided on a number of key indicators in order to assess the impact of the recession across Council services.

Phil Newby reported that current government macroeconomic policy was aimed at combating deflation through quantitative easing, the effect of which was expected to be felt in six months to a year. Deflation it was explained had advantages for the local community and had advantaged the Council in the purchase of Brent House and land for the new Civic Centre land. It was however pointed that the advantages were short term, as deflation also resulted in decreased business investment, placing the Council in a position of decreased revenue inflow but increased demand on its benefit services. It was stated that Council strategy in handling the recession revolved around improved efficiency, while preparing for the eventual economic upturn.

In addressing a Committee proposal for the creation of a contingency fund for hardship cases caused by the recession as had happened in some other Councils, Phil Newby stated that the Council's budget situation would not allow this without cuts to other parts of the Council. He added that resources would however be shifted where necessary to meet any change in service demands. The National Assistance Act it was pointed out could also be utilized in efforts to offer assistance to Brent residents relative to demands.

The Committee explored what new thinking could be developed to spur regeneration, and referred to the need to boost the supply side to generate jobs. Reference was made to the Kilburn regeneration area and what could be done to increase investment in this area. Phil Newby stated that the Council would have to be prepared to take higher degrees of risk in adopting new approaches to regenerating local areas. This would include looking at ways of regenerating the backstreets of shopping areas, as this would then stimulate local demand for goods and services. The Council needed to explore how to better support local businesses in creating jobs but it was recognized that the Council was not equipped to give business advice. However the Council was doing its best to aid businesses in the borough such as working with Business Link, and despite having lost £4 million in Working Neighbourhood Fund. The Committee expressed the view that although the Council had no obligation to give business advice, it had a responsibility to ensure that this resource was available such as through the working relationship with Business Link.

An area of particular concern highlighted by the Committee was that the recession could lead to an increase in crime, and it was asked of Phil Newby if there had been evidence of this in the borough. Phil Newby informed Members that available evidence did not reveal an increase in crime at the present time. It was however pointed out that an academic report on gangs was to be commissioned which would provide greater insight into criminal activity in the borough and the results of this could be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

The Chair thanked Phil Newby for a good report. She stressed that monitoring the impact of the recession on Brent was necessary and had to be ongoing, with particular attention paid to identifying any geographical pattern. It was requested that the Committee be provided with updates similar to the reports to be provided to the Executive on the recession's impact in Brent and that if specific trends were identified consideration could be given to creating a task group to investigate this.

RESOLVED:-

that reports monitoring the recession's impact on Brent based on performance indicators designed to measure this be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

9. **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was provisionally scheduled to take place on 27th May 2009 at 7:30pm but that this would be subject to the agreement of the Council on 18th May 2009.

10. **Any other Urgent Business**

None

The meeting ended at 9:35pm.

L. JONES
Chair