

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Thursday, 14th December 2006 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor D Long (C), Councillor Clues (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Baker (alternate for Councillor Mendoza), Detre, Fox, Sneddon and Thomas.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Leaman and Mendoza.

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

There were none.

2. Minutes of Last Meeting – 19th October 2006

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 19th October 2006 be received and approved as an accurate record, subject to apologies for absence being recorded from Councillors Mendoza and Thomas.

3. Matters Arising

There were none.

4. Appointments to sub-committees

RESOLVED:-

that Councillor Shah be appointed in place of Councillor Sneddon on the Forward Plan Select Committee with immediate effect.

5. Deputations

There were none.

6. Task Group Membership

RESOLVED:-

that the following memberships and appointment of chairs be agreed:

Task group	Membership	Chair
Tourism	Councillors Corcoran, Dunwell and Jones	Councillor Dunwell
Relationships with and Funding of the Voluntary Sector	Councillors Fox, Mistry and Pagnamenta	Councillor Mistry

7. The Corporate Strategy

The Committee had before it a copy of the Corporate Strategy which sets out the Council's priorities and ambitions for Brent over the next four years. The Committee was informed that decisions would be taken within the policy framework and budget set by the Council and it was important that the Committee scrutinised delivery of this programme. However, many aspects of the strategy could not be delivered by the Council alone and involved working with partner organisations. The recent Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* developed a wider community leadership role for councillors and as part of this envisaged overview and scrutiny monitoring partnership activity.

Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director for Policy and Regeneration) added that a key aspiration of the strategy was to make Brent a great place to live in. There were significant challenges for the way some services were provided with a need to reconfigure them so that not only were they better but were more financially viable. Without this the Council would not be able to deliver the strategy. This opened up the possibility for overview and scrutiny to look at a number of efficiency issues facing the Council.

The Chair emphasised the need to regard the strategy as a benchmark of achievement and the importance of overview and scrutiny, using it as a working document to which the Executive could be held to account.

Members discussed how best to identify the measurable aspects of the strategy as opposed to the aspirations contained within it. It was pointed out that the strategy did contain some hard measurable activities. It was put that residents were mostly interested in seeing improved services delivered and in response Cathy Tyson explained that the Resident Attitude survey provided statistical evidence that satisfaction with service delivery was on the increase.

With regard to the challenge of effective partnership working it was explained that many targets were built into the Local Area Agreement (LAA). However, some important issues were not, such as the current PCT funding crisis which was a critical issue for the Children and Families and Adult and Social Care service areas. It was suggested that the Council's role in these partnership arrangements needed to be monitored so that its performance could be measured independently irrespective of the overall delivery performance. Beyond this was the need to be able to challenge the aspects of the service delivery with key government bodies and other public service institutions. Looking at performance within partnerships and the delivery of targets was critical to the development of neighbourhood working referred to in the White Paper. The Committee was informed that the Constitutional Working Group was considering different models of neighbourhood working and would be reporting back to Council on this.

It was acknowledged that the points covered in discussion would have to be borne in mind when determining the Committee's work programme.

8. **Developing an Overview and Scrutiny work programme**

The Committee had before it a suggestion for developing a work programme for the next 18 months. Members put forward their views on how they saw the priorities for the Committee.

RESOLVED:-

that the suggested work programme be received and the following additions and amendments be made to it::

- (i) that the Head of IT be requested to attend the next meeting of the Committee to present the corporate IT strategy scheduled to be submitted to a forthcoming meeting of the Executive and to answer questions from committee members on its implementation, services to members (including remote access), plans to move from Lotus Notes to Microsoft Exchange, the redesign of the Council's web-site and access to the web site by members of the public,
- (ii) that a report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee providing an update on the work of the Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee,
- (iii) that a suggested scope for a future task group to consider the work of the Local Strategic Partnership (Partners for Brent) and the role and performance of the Council within the partnership be presented to the next meeting of the Committee,
- (iv) that the Committee be updated at its next meeting on the work of the tourism and relationships with and funding of the voluntary sector task groups,
- (v) that officers clarify the role of the CCTV steering group within the Council to ensure future scrutiny of this area does not duplicate work already being carried out,
- (vi) that an annual report on the work of the Local Strategic Partnership and Local Area Agreements be incorporated into the work programme, and
- (vii) that the item on the Housing Diversity Strategy included in the suggested work programme for the June 2007 meeting of the committee be considered in the context of the Council wide equality scheme.

9. **Waste Management Contract**

Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director for Policy and Regeneration) reported that the Executive had considered the award of the waste management contract at its meeting on 13th November 2006. The Executive's proposed decisions to recommend the basis of the contract and to award it to Veolia ES (UK) plc

were outside the policy framework because the tendered prices were significantly over the existing budget for the services. This meant that the final decisions on the award of the contract had to be taken by Full Council on 27th November. In the meantime the Performance and Finance Select Committee had considered the matter on 9th November and was broadly supportive of the proposed action. The key to the success of the contract was identified as being how performance was monitored and poor performance addressed.

NOTED

10. **Warden and Reassurance Services in Brent**

As requested at the last meeting the Committee considered a report detailing the provision of warden and reassurance services within Brent. The report identified that there were 3 different warden services – town centre wardens, park wardens and Brent Housing Partnership wardens, and the Safer Neighbourhood Teams. The Council was working to ensure all the services were sufficiently integrated. The Council's warden services were kept under review to ensure they met the needs of the community and to maximise funding. The Safer Neighbourhood Teams were separately managed by the Metropolitan Police but arrangements were in place to share information. A request was made for Members to be given the up to date information on the strength of each team.

NOTED

11. **The Budget Panel – Chair's update**

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Mendoza, Jacqueline Casson, Policy and Performance Officer, read the following report on his behalf:-

The Budget Panel had met on three occasions since the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

It had received evidence from:

- Cllr Lorber – on the Corporate Strategy and the Administration's priorities.
- The Director of Finance and Corporate Resources - on the budget gap 2007/8 and the future financial prospects for the Council.
- Councillor Blackman – on the budget gap and the measures the Administration plan to take to bridge the gap.
- The panel had spent some time focusing on budget pressures by taking evidence from the Director of Housing and Community Care and the Director of Children and Families.

The Budget Panel was due to meet next on 18th December when it would receive an update on the budget position from the Director of Finance &

Corporate Resources and the Director of Environment & Culture on his department's core budget issues, priorities for growth and the potential impact of savings options.

The Panel would also discuss its interim report which would be finalised on 10th January to be forwarded to Executive members prior to the draft budget being published.

NOTED

12. **Information from Area Consultative Forums**

Owen Thomson, Head of Consultation, introduced the report before Members. He explained that the format of the report followed that presented to previous Scrutiny Committees but he felt it might be time to review how information from the area consultative forums was presented to the Committee.

Members felt that the Committee should be alerted to any concurrent themes that emerged from the forums. This was made important given the bottom up approach to formulating the agendas for the forums which meant issues raised represented the concern of local residents. Attention was drawn to paragraph 3.4 of the report and the point was made that the Council carried out additional regular consultation to that lists, including consultation on planning matters and transportation issues. The Chair submitted that many people felt the forums were only 'talking shops' and this perception was largely because of a lack of feedback on the actions the Council had taken. He felt improved response tracking was needed.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted,
- (ii) that the importance of issues raised at area consultative forums being reported back to the Committee be acknowledged,
- (iii) that in recognition of a new neighbourhood structure soon being agreed by the Council upon which arrangements for reporting the issues raised by the area consultative forums will need to be reviewed, the following interim action be taken:
 - the Consultation Team and the Executive Member to continue to consult with ACF and SUCF chairs and lead managers, to identify issues that they wish to bring to the attention of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
 - further information on other aspects of the Council's consultation framework be included in future reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
 - progress on the operation of the newly established Youth Parliament be included in future reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

13. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is scheduled to take place on Thursday 8th February 2007

14. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9.05pm

D Long
Chair