

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

**10 December 2008 at 7.30 pm**

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

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Sneddon (Lead Member for Human Resources & Diversity, Local Democracy and Consultation), and Councillors Dunwell, Farrell (part), Malik (part), Matthews (part), Mendoza (part) and Motley (part).

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

Councillor Castle declared a personal interest in the item on the performance of Registered Social Landlords as a member of the board of Brent Housing Partnership (BHP). He therefore stayed in the room and took part in discussion of the item.

Councillor Mistry also declared a personal interest, as a member of the board of Stadium Housing Association, in the same item and remained in the room to discuss it.

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

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2008 be approved as an accurate record.

### **3. Matters Arising**

None.

### **4. Neighbourhood Working – The First Year**

Christine Collins (Neighbourhood Working Manager) introduced the report and answered questions from members on the work of the Neighbourhood Working Team between November 2007 and October 2008. The report set Neighbourhood Working in the national context of initiatives to improve community engagement and support local councillors as community champions. Christine Collins informed the Committee that neighbourhood working was now operating in all 21 wards across the borough, and structures had been set up, although the Neighbourhood Working Team had been fully staffed only since 1 December 2008. Neighbourhood Working was supported by an officer Steering Group and a Member Reference Group, developing and refining ways of working. A key tool in the past year had been the Councillor walkabout, of which there had been 42 in 19 wards. Neighbourhood bulletins were being produced, two per ward per year, and officers had attended community meetings of various kinds, as well as talking to parents outside schools. There had also been contact with young people in schools. Christine Collins reported that she was encouraged by the way residents had engaged with the Council on Neighbourhood Working, with 560 returns from the "Three Questions" leaflet, for example.

A total of nearly £72,000 had been spent by the end of September 2008, and this had risen to around £85,000 by the end of November 2008. Asked whether any underspend could be rolled over to the next financial year, Christine Collins and Philip Newby informed the Committee that this would not be possible. Christine Collins reported that her team was working very hard to ensure that the money was spent, and she was confident that most of it would be. She drew members' attention to the budget, which showed funds carried forward from previous ward working schemes, together with the allocation for 2008/09. Some issues around Neighbourhood Working required little or no cash, but were more about working with partners to achieve priorities. A wide range of projects had been planned for the future with a wide range of partners, and action plans had been drawn up for each ward. Co-operation between Council departments was key to successful Neighbourhood Working and, while senior officers were committed to this, there could nevertheless be unacceptable delays at times. There was some concern that members did not always have as much information as they would like about what was taking place in their ward, and officers were looking at ways of making this information more accessible. All in all, it was a very positive start, and the team was committed to building on the successes.

Asked about the lessons of the pilot scheme, Philip Newby (Director, Policy and Regeneration) informed members that, while successes had been achieved by getting agencies to work together, sometimes there were problems in ensuring continued effective inter-agency working once the Council had withdrawn. In response to a statement from Councillor Thomas expressing disappointment that difficulties in his ward had not been mentioned in the report, Councillor Sneddon informed the Committee that, although it was difficult when members could not agree matters in their ward, he was satisfied that a good mechanism existed. Councillor Farrell added that the Member Reference Group was a mechanism whereby difficulties could be ironed out to the benefit of local people.

Responding to Councillor Motley's comment that his experience of Neighbourhood Working had been very frustrating, with poor communication and the lack of a support worker, Philip Newby agreed that Queen's Park ward had not received a good service, partly because of difficulty recruiting an officer to take on the role, and he would ensure that it got a good service in future. Christine Collins apologized for the poor service in the past, and reported that an officer had now been allocated to the ward. Responding to Councillor Motley's comment that £5,000 allocated to a library garden in Queen's Park had not been shown in the accounts, Christine Collins agreed to check this.

Answering a question about service planning, Christine Collins reported that, while Neighbourhood Working officers had attended service planning meetings, sometimes projects took longer to get off the ground than expected. Occasionally there were legitimate reasons for delays, and differing reasons why wards had not spent their budget. Councillor Sneddon added that this was a new way of working, which would take time to develop in some cases.

In response to a question about the resources available to the Neighbourhood Working Team, Philip Newby informed the Committee that the service would be better if the team were bigger, and Councillor Sneddon drew members' attention to the fact that not all resources came on stream straight away. Responding to a suggestion that the Council inform itself about good practice in other councils, Christine Collins reported that Brent had successfully proposed a London-wide network to share good practice. Meetings would be quarterly, and one had taken place so far.

The Chair summed up the following key issues on which it was agreed that the Committee would receive a report in the next 3-6 months:

- engagement and commitment of members in general, with a view to achieving progress across the board;
- members' satisfaction with the process, particularly where there were issues such as disagreements within wards split by councillors' party affiliation, or wards that had started the process late;
- new ways of involving a wider range of residents.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that a report be brought to the Committee in 3-6 months on key issues of members' engagement, commitment and satisfaction with the process, and new ways of involving residents.

#### 5. **Performance Information on Joint Commissioning Registered Social Landlords**

Maggie Rafalowicz (Assistant Director, Housing Strategy and Regeneration) introduced the report and answered questions from members on aspects of performance relating to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), or Registered Providers (RPs), operating in Brent. She reported that officers had worked with RSLs and partner boroughs in the West London sub-region to develop a performance management framework and reporting methodology. Brent had rolled out the agreed framework to its Joint Commissioning (JC) preferred partners and Brent Housing Partnership, the Council's Arms-Length Management Organisation. Additional detailed monitoring of BHP was done outside of this framework.

The Chair welcomed Pam Lockley (Managing Director, Paddington Churches Housing Association – PCHA) and Roz Spencer (Chief Executive, Stadium Housing Association), who spoke about performance and answered questions from members.

Roz Spencer informed members that there had been significant problems at Westfield Close, where there were several landlords, and the problems had been exacerbated by the lack of unified management arrangements. Now there were strong partnership

arrangements on common services, and engagement had increased. Stadium Housing Association was open and collaborative with partners, and Roz Spencer believed there was evidence of performance improvement in Brent and more widely, and the organisation was developing measures focussed on outcome, for example, arranging repairs by appointment and completing work within one visit. Monthly performance indicators were available on the organisation's website.

Answering a question about Locata and transfers, Roz Spencer reported that Locata was working very well, but that the organisation was learning that it needed to tailor support for more vulnerable people. In a recent survey, 40% of tenants had declared that they were unhappy with the size of their home. This was a common concern that needed to be embraced. Maggie Rafalowicz added that Brent had the second-highest level of overcrowding in London.

Pam Lockley reported that PCHA had been focussing on improved satisfaction levels and the number of repairs carried out within one visit, as 80% of tenants said this was the most important issue for them. Big improvements had been made, with targets exceeded. She expressed the hope that the West London targets might focus more on outcome in future.

Answering a question about recycling for flat-dwellers, Maggie Rafalowicz reported that a meeting had been held with Brent Housing Group (BHG) to move this forward.

Asked about tenant participation in, for example, the work of the boards of their organisations, Pam Lockley reported that resident participation had tripled in the previous three years, with tenants now involved in designing and monitoring service, and the biggest factor in improving performance on repairs had been a maintenance action group. Three out of 12 board members were tenants, and one leaseholder was also on the board. Roz Spencer reported a similar range of ways of involving residents, with tenants making up 25% of the board, and a consumer panel of between 400 and 500 tenants available for focus groups and phone surveys. There was an enormous appetite for involvement.

Maggie Rafalowicz added that the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), which had replaced the Housing Corporation, placed a lot of emphasis on tenants' views, and was entering into consultation with tenants up and down the country on standards. The TSA would also be looking at tenant satisfaction and standards for Council and ALMO tenants. Asked about a forum for Brent tenants, she reported that resources had not been available to continue with the Brent Social Housing Tenants' Forum, but officers were now reviewing how it could be revived.

Discussing BHP performance, members noted that BHP provided performance statistics in a specific way that did not match the West London approach. Nevertheless, Maggie Rafalowicz reported that in relation to repairs BHP's satisfaction levels had improved.

Members expressed an interest in information in future from London and Quadrant Housing Association (which had taken over the homes of Ujima Housing Association), together with a comparison of the performance of RSLs in Brent and elsewhere, and feedback from estates such as Stonebridge, Church End and Chalkhill, which had transferred from Council ownership.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that information be brought to the Committee in future from London and Quadrant Housing Association, together with a comparison of the performance of RSLs in Brent and elsewhere, and feedback from estates such as Stonebridge, Church End and Chalkhill, which had transferred from Council ownership;
- (iii) that future reports be presented annually.

(Councillor Castle declared a personal interest in this item as a member of the board of Brent Housing Partnership (BHP). He therefore stayed in the room and took part in the discussion.

Councillor Mistry also declared a personal interest, as a member of the board of Stadium Housing Association, and remained in the room to discuss the item.)

## 6. **Access to Health Sites Task Group**

Councillor Leaman introduced the final report of the task group on access to health sites by public transport. The task group had been set up jointly by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Health Select Committee. Councillor Leaman informed the Committee that the basic problem in matching public transport to healthcare and healthcare changes was how some parts of the NHS dealt with the public transport authorities. However, it was refreshing that the NHS recognised this. The recommendations of the task group arose out of an awareness of a lack of communication between the NHS, the Council and Transport for London (TfL), and the fact that, while the Council and TfL had a working relationship, this was not always the case between the NHS and TfL.

Andrew Davies (Policy and Performance Officer, Policy and Regeneration) circulated to the Committee comments received from participants in the review. Commenting on discussion of bus links to, for example, Northwick Park hospital, he informed the Committee that tracking of this issue was important, and he hoped that the Health Select Committee would be able to do this.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the Committee agree the recommendations of the report;

- (ii) that, subject to any changes made by the Health Select Committee, to be incorporated by both chairs, the report be passed to the Council's Executive for approval, before being sent formally to other organisations affected by the recommendations.

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

Jacqueline Casson (Senior Policy Officer, Policy and Regeneration) introduced the Work Programme, together with a draft scoping report on establishing a task group on support services for women exiting prostitution, and a briefing the Committee had requested on the policy and principles underlying the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders. Members agreed to add to the Work Programme the issue of members' IT support, and to invite an officer to report to the next meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Matthews (Lead Member for Crime Prevention and Public Safety) informed the Committee that the scoping report had arisen as a result of a London-wide sex industry survey, which had identified Brent as having the second highest number of advertisements for brothels. It was not clear whether this statistic indicated a large number of brothels or was simply a publicity issue. Councillor Matthews reported that the issue of prostitutes' health and exit strategies had been raised with Brent Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership and partners, who were interested in supporting the work of the proposed task group. Members agreed that the task group process could be a shared learning process for everyone involved, and it was hoped that representatives of partners, for example, Police Community Support Officers, might be co-opted onto the task group.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the issue of members' IT support be added to the Work Programme, with an officer to report to the next meeting of the Committee;
- (ii) that the Committee agree to set up a task group on support services for women exiting prostitution, as outlined in the scoping report, and that group offices be approached for membership and partner agencies for co-opted members.

## **8. Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on 10 February 2009.

## **9. Any Other Urgent Business**

None.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm.

L JONES  
Chair