



LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE Wednesday, 28 July 2010 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Colwill (Vice Chair in the Chair) and Councillors Clues, Kabir, Lorber (alternate for Councillor Castle), Long, Mashari and Mistry.

Also Present: Councillors John (Leader of the Council)

Apologies were received from: Councillor Castle

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23 March 2010

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2010 be received and approved as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising (if any)

None.

4. Appointments to Sub-Committees (if any)

None.

5. Leader's Update on the Council's Priorities

Councillor John (Leader of the Council) provided an update on the key issues facing the Council and the priorities that it would seek to address. Councillor John began by describing the Council's financial circumstances which required it to identify savings of £94 million, up from the £50 million initially needed. There were a number of streams of funding that were either being reduced or stopped altogether, including area based, performance award and housing grants. Members noted that because of the acute financial constraints, some services would need to be changed in the way they were delivered, whilst for others there needed to be consideration as to whether they were of sufficient priority to continue. Councillor John emphasised that the Council needed to be smarter and

better in service delivery and that it faced many difficult challenges ahead. It was important that a coherent and disciplined approach was taken by the Executive.

Councillor John then set out what the Council had undertaken so far and what its future objectives would be. Members noted that £6.6 million savings would be achieved this year and the £25 charge to remove bulky waste would be abolished. A pilot initiative to boost local shopping facilities for the local community would be launched, whilst there was an aspiration to ultimately reach a recycling waste target of 60 per cent as against the present rate of approximately 28 per cent. This would require introducing a number of measures and changing the behaviour of residents. Councillor John commented that there had already been a number of regeneration schemes in Brent in the last decade and stressed the need that regeneration continues, particularly in Alperton, South Kilburn, the North Circular Road area, Church End, Burnt Oak and the Colindale Corridor. The regeneration of Wembley continued to be the most pivotal, with the intention to provide more entertainment and homes and make the area a destination venue and the developers, Quintain PLC, were ready for the next phase of the scheme.

Councillor John advised that improving the Council's green credentials was another important priority, including reducing CO2 emissions, signing up to the Green Charter and a commitment to Fair Trade products. It was the Council's intention to improve the Public Realm, including improving parks, sports and leisure and also swimming pool facilities where there was a particular shortfall in provision. Extending the provision of mobile swimming pools could be considered as such pools had been well used in instances where they had been provided. The Committee heard that pressure on school places continued to be a problem and there was a need to improve youth facilities, however there would be difficulties in obtaining additional funding required to achieve this. There were also a number of significant changes that were taking place in some service areas, including Adult Social Care with a move towards fulfilling the Personalisation agenda, of which there was a need for more comprehensive consultation with adults with special needs and learning disabilities, their carers and relatives. This would also entail consideration of the future of the Day Centres in the Borough. The Council would continue to work with the police and partners to reduce crime and the fear of crime. Councillor John emphasised that the opening of the Civic Centre in 2013 would make a significant contribution to achieving the Council's savings targets, as well as providing improved working conditions and being amongst the most greenest buildings in the Country. Members noted that the Corporate Strategy was presently being drafted. Councillor John concluded by stating that the overall objectives were to make the Council more efficient whilst also providing higher quality services.

During Members' discussion, Councillor Colwill (Vice Chair in the Chair) enquired what risks were posed in delivering the Corporate Strategy. He commented that issues such as parks, Adult Social Care and swimming pool provision were all areas that the Committee could consider. Councillor Kabir felt that the provision of GP services needed to be looked at, especially in light of the changes that were being made in the Health Sector. Councillor Long felt that there needed to be a more co-ordinated approach in promoting Brent as a Fairtrade Borough, stating that there were currently few outlets in Brent that supported Fairtrade. She suggested that cafes on Council premises could lead by example by stocking Fairtrade products. Councillor Mistry enquired whether any improvements could

be made to the Town Hall Annexe in the interim before the Council moved to the Civic Centre.

Councillor Clues felt that there was a need for the Council to be more open and accessible to the public and build a rapport with residents in view of the challenging circumstances that were faced. This could include increasing consultation and considering other ways in which the Council could consult with residents. Councillor Lorber enquired whether the Executive was fully supportive of the move to the Civic Centre and sought confirmation as to whether the regeneration of the North Circular Road area was still proposed. Clarification was sought with regard to the Council's present recycling rate. Councillor Lorber commented that the Council had made preparations some 24 months in advance the savings that it had identified and there had already been a number of initiatives, such as the deletion of a number of management posts that had delivered significant savings. He enquired whether there other staff reductions planned which would go substantially beyond that which had already been carried out. With regard to withdrawing the fee to collect bulky waste items, Councillor Lorber stated that this issue had been considered by the previous administration and this service had never been free to landlords, however with the growth in rented properties there had been reason to consider introducing the charge. Councillor Mashari spoke of the need to review youth services and improve facilities for this age group, stating that such a measure would also provide many other wider benefits to the community, such as helping to reduce crime. She felt that every effort should be made to ensure that savings initiatives had minimal impact on young and vulnerable people. Councillor Mashari also suggested that there needed to be better information sharing between schools, the police and the Council.

In reply to the issues raised, Councillor John advised that the proposals to remove funding and powers from local authorities by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government posed considerable challenges in delivering the Corporate Strategy. The Corporate Strategy would include objectives with regard to encouraging Fairtrade within the Borough and would begin through changing Council internal supplies to Fairtrade products before steps were taken to boost use of Fairtrade goods in the wider Borough. With regard to Council buildings, Councillor John commented that there were other buildings as well as the Town Hall Annexe whose working conditions could be better, although all buildings met Health and Safety standards. She stressed the importance in ensuring staff moves to the Civic Centre were undertaken swiftly in order to minimise disruption. The Committee heard that there had been some questions amongst some Executive Members with regard to the consultation process for the Civic Centre, however all supported the move to the new building. Newly elected councillors had been provided with a lot of information concerning the Civic Centre proposals and the benefits of the move. Councillor John acknowledged that because of the challenging circumstances for local authorities it would be difficult to maintain a positive image with residents and some difficult decisions needed to be made. She welcomed any suggestions with regard to consultation and making the Council more accessible, adding that Council meetings were generally not particularly popular with residents.

Councillor John confirmed that it remained the intention of the Council to pursue a regeneration scheme for the North Circular Road area. She stated that the bulky

waste charge had been dropped as it was a burden to those on small incomes and added that the Council would be obliged to collect bulky waste in any case in the event of it being dumped. Councillor John added that the bulky waste charge had proven to be unpopular and had not been effective. The amount of savings required could not be underestimated and in terms of staff costs, a number of issues needed to be revisited, such as the fact that some officers' salaries had an Inner London Weighting attached, others an Outer London Weighting and other additional payments and overtime arrangements also needed to be reviewed. Members were informed that withdrawal of Government funding in a particular area could mean in some instances the end of a particular function and therefore also certain jobs. Councillor John stressed the role of scrutiny in providing input into this issue. Councillor John welcomed there being a number of younger councillors being elected and felt they could play a significant role in giving a voice to young people. However, she warned that lack of funding limited opportunities to increase youth facilities. In spite of this, many schools had undertaken good initiatives and every effort would be made to encourage young people to use Council facilities, whilst there would also be a focus on using school facilities more often. Councillor John advised Members that some organisations in the Voluntary Sector would have funding withdrawn or reduced and that provision of GP services would come under the remit of the Health Select Committee.

Phil Newby (Director of Policy and Regeneration) confirmed that provision of GP services was part of the Health Select Committee work programme and that the Government were making a number of announcements in respect of health provision and were considering what statutory responsibilities local authorities should have. He advised Members that it had been suggested that Councils create a Health and Well-Being Board as part of its' Executive function and developments on this would be reported to the Health Select Committee.

Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director – Policy, Policy and Regeneration) confirmed that the present recycling rate was around 28 per cent, however it had reached a peak of 32 per cent.

6. The One Council Programme

Phil Newby introduced this item and circulated a paper detailing the current stage of One Council projects at tranches one and two. In respect of the Brent Business Support project, Phil Newby advised that the project's objectives were to create a sharper, improved and more modern business support function. The Children's Social Care project addressed a number of key issues, including fostering in the Borough, whilst the Income Generation project was currently at the concept stage. The Reshaping Customer Contact project sought to look at other ways of contact with customers, such as through the web, e-mail and telephone as face to face contact was the most expensive method of customer service. Wave One of the Review of Lower Priority Areas (ROLPA) project had been stopped as its activities had either generated new projects or merged with existing ones, however this project was presently under reconsideration under Wave Two. Members heard that the Strategic Procurement Review project was a key one which would yield considerable savings. Similarly, the Strategic Property Review project would also make significant savings and looked at how Council buildings were used, with some 14 buildings either up for sale or having their leases ended. Phil Newby advised that the Structure and Staffing project looked at the need to balance the

manager to staff ratio and a further 300 posts were due for deletion by September 2010, with compulsory redundancies avoided where possible. Members noted that Price Waterhouse Coopers had been recruited to provide a supporting role, although the Council was solely responsible for the delivery of this project. It was confirmed that the Waste and Recycling project's outcome had developed a new Waste Strategy and this was due for consideration at the 11 August meeting of the Executive.

Phil Newby informed Members that the New Ways of Working project's objective was to ensure that the Council was fit for purpose when it moved to the Civic Centre. The Special Educational Needs (SEN) Review project was necessary as it needed to address the impact on SEN facilities following the withdrawal of the Building Schools for Future programme. In respect of the Total Place project, this was to be re-named Community Budgets and the Committee heard that the Council was in discussion with its partners as to how resources would be used and it was conceivable that the Council could help with back office functions and sharing buildings with some partners. The Willesden project sought to investigate options in re-developing the Willesden Centre and enhance its role as the south of the Borough's main customer contact point.

With the approval of the Chair, Robert Dunwell addressed the Committee. Robert Dunwell commented that the contractors were obliged to remove dumped items and therefore he suggested that the loss of revenue from removing the bulky waste removal charge should be made up through renegotiating the contract with the contractor.

During Members' discussion, the Chair asked what steps were taken to ensure there was not disruption to services whilst they were in transition. He sought views on what particular projects this Committee should focus on and he asked that payments to external organisations supporting the projects be tracked for Members' information. He also advised that Members could request that specific projects be considered by the Committee. Councillor Clues sought views as to how the proposed new scrutiny structure would be an improvement on the previous one. He also commented that there should be a coordinated approach to addressing SEN and Children's Social Care, stating that a lack of progress for a child's SEN would impact upon their social care too. Councillor Kabir commented that in some cases SEN facilities were sought from other boroughs because they were not available in Brent and suggested that in the SEN review, the Concept Paper should take into account the need for flexibility in order to not impinge unnecessarily on residents.

Councillor Long enquired on the duration of the projects to be fully implemented and what stage would they be considered by the overview and scrutiny committees. With regard to the Reshaping Customer Contact project and increasing telephone contact, she commented on the need to be mindful of the frustration customers experience when they cannot get through and she asked what steps would be taken to ensure that they would. Councillor Lorber sought further details on the Income Generation, Reshaping Customer Contact and Waste and Recycling projects and whether Deloitte were still being used to support the projects. He commented that there were a significant proportion of properties that did not have sufficient room for green boxes, whilst there were also too many grey bins provided which meant that the contractor would collect more

waste that would then be sent to landfill. It was suggested that a proportion of the grey bins be replaced with green boxes. Councillor Mashari enquired whether dumped bulky items could still be recycled.

In reply to the issues raised, Phil Newby advised that provision to ensure services were not disrupted during the transition phase had been built into the projects' remit. He suggested that project leaders could be invited to address the Committee and respond to Members' questions, whilst the renamed Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Health Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consider the important issues regarding SEN and Child Social Care and changes to Health Service provision respectively. Phil Newby confirmed that the new scrutiny structure had been agreed by the Constitutional Working Group and would facilitate more focused scrutiny on how the Council's partnerships worked. Members heard that there would be regular reports on the progress of the projects and these would give opportunities for the Committee to consider to what extent these projects were delivering. Phil Newby agreed that it was important that the SEN review should ensure that there was flexibility for SEN users and consideration of what services could be provided within Brent. He confirmed that a report on Income Generation was due to be published, whilst a model had been created for Reshaping Customer Contact. A Customer Journey Project was being piloted in Adult Social Care and it was anticipated that this would be rolled out to other service areas over time. Phil Newby advised that work continued on the detail of the processes in improving customer contact, including by telephone which he acknowledged did generate a number of lost calls and a key objective would be to ensure that the customer was connected to the appropriate officer at the earliest stage. There were also moves to increase the ratio of front line staff in relation to back office positions. Members heard that in terms of Procurement, consideration of renegotiating some contracts was being considered and it was anticipated that this would generate considerable savings.

Phil Newby advised that during consideration of what resources were necessary to deliver projects, if more needed to be spent to achieve this, then the project needed to demonstrate that it would achieve a corresponding increase in savings. He added that whilst projects' success should not be totally dependent on consultants, their expertise was sometimes required in certain areas where the Council's knowledge may be lacking.

Cathy Tyson added that, in respect to Income Generation, a fundamental review of what services were being provided and the basis of their provision, including whether there should be a fee for such a service, was being undertaken. The Waste and Recycling project had focused on improving recycling access to a wider range of properties, such as flatted properties.

7. Tubbs Road Traffic Management

Tim Jackson (Head of Transportation Unit, Environment and Culture) presented this item which updated Members on the implementation of recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Highways Committee following a Councillor Call for Action in respect of traffic issue in and around Tubbs Road. Tim Jackson stated that both Tubbs Road and Nightingale Road were residential roads which carried considerable volumes of traffic and he advised that

there were no simple solutions to the problems being experienced. Tim Jackson then updated Members on progress on the various measures recommended by the Committee and in particular with regard to banning turns. He advised that this would redirect the traffic onto other roads, particularly onto Harlesden High Street which already had very high levels of traffic. In addition, the High Street and Harrow Road formed part of the London's Strategic Road Network, so any measures affecting traffic volume for these roads would require the approval of Transport for London (TfL) which was unlikely in this instance. There was some progress on other measures suggested, such as installing signage to the A40 via Scrubs Lane and contacting map providers to ensure that the width restriction on Tubbs Road was identified by them, as outlined in the report. However, Tim Jackson advised that most drivers were aware that Tubbs Road provided a short cut and would continue to use the road on a daily basis, therefore the impact of such measures would be limited.

Tim Jackson informed Members that a Harlesden Area Based Scheme was being developed, a long term project that would take a holistic approach to the area, and would include addressing issues in respect of Tubbs Road and residents were involved in its' Working Group. Whilst there was no quick solution to the issues involved, officers would continue to work with residents and ward councillors to develop the Harlesden Area Based Scheme to address the concerns.

With the approval of the Chair, a member of the public addressed the Committee. The member of the public requested that the Harlesden Area Based Scheme should address phasing of traffic lights to help make it easier for pedestrians to cross the road.

During Members' discussion, the Chair enquired whether residents were satisfied with the explanations provided and in the Harlesden Area Based Scheme. Councillor Clues agreed that the Tubbs Road issues should be addressed as part of the Harlesden Area Based Scheme and he also suggested that a re-phasing of the traffic lights could improve the situation. Councillor Long stressed the need for a holistic approach and added that residents had complained about difficulties in crossing Tubbs Road at the junction with Station Road, suggesting that re-phasing the lights to give pedestrians more opportunity to cross would be beneficial. Other issues that needed to be addressed included double parking and larger lorries experiencing problems accessing Scrubs Lane because of a weak bridge.

In reply, Tim Jackson advised that residents had accepted the advice provided by officers and were working with them in looking at ways of improving the situation, including involvement in developing the Harlesden Area Based Scheme. In addition, TfL had indicated that they felt the Harlesden Area Based Scheme was worthwhile, although Tim Jackson advised that the current economic situation may impact on funds available for area based schemes. He acknowledged the problems in respect of double parking and the weak bridge limiting access for some lorries to Scrubs Lane and he agreed that he would respond to Councillor Long's query. Tim Jackson also agreed to write to a resident who had written in seeking clarification on some issues in relation to Tubbs Road.

8. The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2009/10

Jacqueline Casson (Senior Policy Officer – Policy, Policy and Regeneration) drew Members attention to the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2009/10 which reflected the work of all the committees within the Council's overview and scrutiny structure. The Chair thanked all those involved in the work carried out in the year and the respective chairs of all these committees in 2009/10, namely Councillor Jones (Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee); former Councillor Motley (Chair, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee); former Councillor Mendoza (Chair, Budget Panel); former Councillor Dunn (Chair, Performance and Finance Select Committee); Councillor Leaman (Chair, Health Select Committee); and Councillor Long (Chair, Forward Plan Select Committee).

RESOLVED:-

that the Overview and Scrutiny Report for 2009/10 be agreed.

9. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Jacqueline Casson advised that this item provided Members with the opportunity to suggest items for inclusion in the Committee's Work Programme for 2010/11.

Councillor Clues requested that an item on the Personalisation Budget for people with learning disabilities be included for discussion for the 13 October meeting and that the Corporate Strategy also be included on the Work Programme. The Chair added that this include information on direct payments, including details of the number of users who had transferred to this system. Councillor Mistry asked that an item on the Review of Customer Contact be included on the Work Programme, including what measures were being considered with regard to language barriers.

In reply to queries from Councillor Clues with regard to the proposed new overview and scrutiny structure, Jacqueline Casson advised that the following overview and scrutiny committees would be created:-

- One Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee (replaces Overview and Scrutiny Committee)
- Partnership and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee (replaces Performance and Finance Select Committee)
- Health Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee (replaces Health Select Committee)
- Budget and Finance Overview and Scrutiny Committee (replaces Budget Panel)
- Call-in Overview and Scrutiny Committee (replaces Forward Plan Select Committee)

Phil Newby confirmed that the Corporate Strategy would be put before both Full Council and this Committee.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that report on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme be noted; and

- (ii) that items on Personalisation and Direct Payments in relation to people with learning disabilities, the Corporate Strategy and Review of Customer Contact be added to the Work Programme.

10. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 12 October 2010 at 7.30 pm.

11. Any Other Urgent Business

Process For Registering Town Greens in Brent – Gladstone Park

With the approval of the Chair, Dilywn Chambers addressed the Committee. Dilywn Chambers referred to an application to register Gladstone Park as a town green which had been listed in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme in 2009/10 as an item rolled over for possible consideration this year. The application had been rejected by the relevant authorities and Dilywn Chambers felt the Council had not given the support to the application that it merited. He requested details of the legal advice that had been provided and asked if this item could be considered further. Dilywn Chambers was advised that it was more appropriate that the Executive provide clarity on this issue.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm.

R. COLWILL
VICE-CHAIR IN THE CHAIR