



MINUTES OF THE ONE COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE Wednesday 9 October 2013 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Ashraf (Chair) and Councillors Chohan, Harrison, Jones, Lorber, Long and Powney

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Cheese

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Colwill

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

Councillor Lorber advised that he was a member of the Barham Park Library campaign.

2. Deputations (if any)

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 10 July 2013

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2013 be approved as a correct record.

4. Matters arising

An update was sought on the progress achieved in recruiting to the post of Strategic Director for Health, Education and Social Care. Members of the committee subsequently noted that councillors had previously been provided with written notification of new senior appointments and requested that this practice be revived. Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director of Policy) advised that she did not know the timescale for recruitment to this post.

It was further noted that several pieces of requested information had not been provided to the committee and that officers would seek updates in respect of the following:

- The provision of a seminar on the impact and actions of the Welfare Reforms;
- Clarification regarding targets and spending figures if over and above, or in line with the previous borough plan;
- Information on the spend on consultants and agency staff.

5. Performance and Finance report Quarter 1 2013/14

Cathy Tyson (Assistant Director of Policy) presented a report to the committee introducing the Performance and Finance review for quarter 1 (Q1), 2013-14. Members were advised that the performance element of the full report, which was attached as appendix 1, reflected a transition towards revised performance reporting. It would be redesigned to centre on the key performance indicators highlighted in the new Corporate Plan which was currently in development. Members' attention was subsequently drawn to the executive summary of the performance element of the report and it was noted that at present 39 per cent of all indicators were rated either Green or Amber, with 13 per cent categorised as Red. It was explained that the remainder were indicative only, and whilst useful did not measure service performance but rather provided information on subjects against which targets could not be set, such as the number of children on the Child Protection Register. It was intended that there would be a reduced number of indicative-only indicators in future performance reporting.

An overview of each service area was given by Cathy Tyson, highlighting the recent or planned introduction of new indicators and any concerns or anticipated pressures. It was noted that one of the new indicators introduced for this quarter for Children and Families reflected the Ofsted judgements for Brent's Schools. At present, this indicator was rated Red and it was explained that this was due to the target being set at zero for the number of schools judged inadequate. Performance against recycling targets was addressed and it was emphasised that there had been a lot of improvement in this area over recent years. The alerts for these indicators were currently red but this was subject to potential change as the figures regarding residual waste and recycling were provisional due to the time lag. The impact of the Welfare Reforms was evident across departments. The number of households in temporary accommodation had been increasing since Q1 2012/13 but this remained within the forecasted rise due to the implementation of a comprehensive package of mitigating actions. Performance against the national indicator N181, time taken to process all new Benefit claims, had dipped, in the first quarter of 2013/14 due to exceptionally high demand on the Benefits Services. Performance against this target was significantly better in July 2013 and it was anticipated that there would be considerable improvement against this indicator during Q2. Turning to the finance element of the report, Cathy Tyson advised that the council was currently forecasting an overspend of £714,000 but that actions were in place to mitigate this.

In the subsequent discussion members raised several issues. It was queried how schools judged inadequate by Ofsted would be supported to improve and a suggestion was made that monitoring be similarly undertaken of Ofsted judgements for Brent's Children's Centres. A member noted with concern that Pupil and Parent services had an overspend of £929,000 and queried what measures were in place to ensure that this was kept under control. Further explanation was requested regarding the review of the Alternate Education Service and a concern was raised regarding provision for those children without a school place. Councillor Lorber asserted that it was important that there was sufficient support in place for those pupils waiting for an appropriate offer of a school place. With reference to the proportion of Looked After Children placed with Independent Foster Carers, a member queried whether there needed to be provision to support LAC remaining with their foster families beyond the age of eighteen.

Responding to these queries, Cathy Tyson confirmed that robust measures were in place to support regular budget review and detailed monitoring via Departmental Management Teams, the Corporate Management Team and the council's strategic finance function. These mechanisms would ensure that Heads of Service would be made to account for any overspend and that appropriate oversight was in place. She further explained that following the award of an inadequate rating, Ofsted would issue clear recommendations for improvement and a detailed plan would be devised. The council's School Improvement Service would work with the school to ensure that all of Ofsted's recommendations were enacted. The possibility of monitoring the Ofsted ratings of Brent Children's Centres would be explored further. The review of the Alternate Education Service did not affect those children without the offer of a school place; rather the service aimed to support children who had been excluded from school. The service had been reconfigured to be delivered in a different way and efficiency savings had been identified in relation to improved management, teaching staff and through co-location of facilities. Turning to the question of supporting LAC after the age of 18 years old, Cathy Tyson explained that semi-independent provision was available for those who did not feel ready to move into their own accommodation.

Members requested additional information on the actions being taken to address performance against recycling targets and incidences of fly tipping, with comment being passed on the impact on these of commercial businesses. A member questioned the efficiency of using street cleaning operatives to sort waste into recyclables and non-recyclables at the point of collection. It was further asserted that streets in poor condition led residents to be ill-disposed towards council messages encouraging recycling. A member commented that there was an established problem of rubbish being dumped in alleyways. It was acknowledged that alleyways were the responsibility of residents but it was queried if the council offered any assistance in addressing this problem.

Michael Read (Operational Director of Environment and Protection) advised that he understood that targeted work had been undertaken by the enforcement team to encourage appropriate disposal of waste, in order to address the overspend resulting from disposal costs. This may have led to reduced focus temporarily on the investigation of fly tipping incidents. It was explained that the council did not offer a commercial service for waste disposal but did monitor businesses to ensure appropriate arrangements were in place. Members were further advised that the council had previously delivered a programme to gate entrances to alleyways; however, there was no longer the resource for this and the council would now only be able to assist through enforcement action. Cathy Tyson explained that littered streets reflected a behavioural issue which needed to be addressed and in view of this, the street cleaning operatives were used efficiently.

Discussion was held on the use of the number of visits to a library as an indicator, with a member advising that he considered that the number of book issues would be a better measure of library use. The committee acknowledged the usefulness of both measures, noting the wide range of uses to which libraries were put.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

6. Parking update

Michael Read outlined the paper update on the three borough joint Parking Enforcement Contract to the committee. The contract went live in Brent on 4 July 2013 and encompassed the adoption of an industry-standard IT system, SiDem, moving away from a traditional model of enforcement. The technological innovations on which the new model was predicated included the use of an online database to allow the automatic identification of vehicles likely to be illegally parked, via Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) devices. The new model also relied upon the implementation of new customer channels of contact, with transactions taking place online, by phone or by text. Brent's Parking Shops, which had previously allowed transactions to be conducted in person, had been closed in May 2013.

Members were advised by Michael Read that the complex mobilisation phase of the contract had been successful overall, with effective staff transfer and enforcement operations, migration of historic data to SiDem and the successful transfer of CCTV functions to the civic centre. The contract was on track to deliver the anticipated full year savings of over £850k per year. It was possible that there would be some further savings achievable through reduced mobilisation and set up costs and these would be considered via the open book contract management process. Serco's performance regarding on-street enforcement had been satisfactory but it was acknowledged that there had been significant problems during the implementation of the new system. The online permit processing system had been inherited with significantly reduced operational functionality from the previous contract, leading to a decreased ability to deal with permit applications online and subsequently, a far greater volume of telephone calls received. In turn this had resulted in unacceptable call waiting times, call abandonment rates and poor customer experiences. These issues had since been addressed through remediation plans for the permitting software and contact centre performance. Good progress had been made, evidenced by the reduced call waiting time and number of calls reporting difficulties with the online system. New call handling menus would also be implemented to improve the customer experience.

During members' discussion, the committee noted the difficulties experienced by residents in using the new online system and sought an explanation of why an interim system combining both the new and old systems was not considered. Concerns were raised regarding the capacity of the new system to cope with the volume of use and a breakdown of call centre performance and type of calls received across peak and non-peak times was requested. Noting that an additional call centre had been established to manage the high volume of calls, it was queried what impact this had on achieving the targeted savings. Confirmation was sought that there was sufficient numbers of ANPR vehicles and Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) to ensure effective enforcement. Members queried how anomalous increases in non-compliance would be understood by the system. Queries were also raised regarding potential abuses of the system and how these would be identified and dealt with. The committee put a number of questions to the officers regarding the customer experience and queried how community, voluntary and charitable organisations would be dealt with under the new system. A member noted that Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government,

had issued an announcement proposing a ban on the use of CCTV cameras to identify and issue tickets to those parked illegally. It was queried how this proposal would impact Brent.

Responding to members' questions, Michael Read and David Thrall (Head of Safer Streets) explained that the replacement of scratch card permits with registration to the online database was key to ensuring that the new system operated efficiently. Furthermore, a mixed model would not allow savings to be realised and could result in a renegotiation of the contract with Serco. It would be costly and difficult to pursue a return to the use of scratch card permits, even in the interim, as the infrastructure to support this service model no longer existed. The new system allowed efficient, targeted deployment of CEOs based on data received from the five ANPR vehicles. These vehicles would patrol the borough each day, matching details against the on-line permit database, to create a rolling 'heat map' of non-compliant parking. The system was able to recognise where events created one-off or irregular peaks in non-compliance. CEOs would be deployed to investigate cars flagged as potentially parked illegally and would issue tickets if required. ANPR vehicles did not automatically issue tickets. It was highlighted that previously, CEOs had spent a significant proportion of their time identifying compliant vehicles.

The officers confirmed that Serco did not have a target for the volume of tickets issued and it was noted that parking compliance levels would be published. It was also considered that the new system addressed a significant proportion of the abuses of the current system. Almost all permits would be vehicle specific at the point of issue and checks of customer details could be made. It would be evident if individuals were buying visitor permits excessively and if residents were found to be breaching the terms and conditions of the parking permits, they could be withdrawn. It was acknowledged that under the previous system certain organisations individuals had been able to obtain permits, contrary to the terms and conditions. A formal review of the parking policy would be required in the coming year to assess whether provision should be made for these organisations. If it was decided to terminate access to parking permits for these bodies considerable notice would be provided. Approval had been granted for 'cared for permits'; these would be available to those on the care register for a cost of £65 per annum.

It was explained to members that proof of purchase would be provided to customers either by email, text, or with a reference number. There was also an option to pay by cash; this option still required the customer to apply online or via the telephone but allowed payment via one of the pay point retailers accessible in the borough. Addressing members' queries regarding call centre performance, Michael Read further explained that at present the highest levels of calls were received on Mondays and Tuesdays, with peak times between 9.00 and 10.00 am and before lunch times. A large proportion of the calls received currently were to set up accounts and it had been profiled that these would peak between October 2013 and February 2014. The target was for calls to be answered in less than a minute. Once through to an operator, a call to purchase a permit should take less than a minute to complete. Daily reports on Serco's call centre performance were provided to Michael Read and performance was improving. Members were advised that the additional call centre established to meet the high level of demand did not constitute an additional cost to the council. Rather the costs to the council related to the number of calls received. If the level of calls continued to the end of the year it would equate to £100,000 additional cost to the council. This had been forecasted

and would still allow the financial savings targeted to be achieved. The costs of redundancies required by the contract would be met by the council, although it was thought that these were likely to be lower than anticipated. Michael Read confirmed the proposal made by Eric Pickles would need to be subject to consultation and many local authorities would be extremely concerned about it being taken further. It was understood that reference had principally been made by Eric Pickles to the use of static cameras which would not impact Brent's system.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

7. **One Council Programme update**

Irene Bremang (Programme Management Office Manager) introduced the report before the committee and delivered a presentation updating members on the One Council (OC) Programme. This programme was launched in 2009 and aimed to provide a framework for delivering organisational change and improved service delivery to limit the impact of budget reduction on Brent residents. The targeted savings for the four year programme period was up to £100m from the base budget by 2014/15..

The committee was advised by Irene Bremang that since the last update to the committee in May 2013, five projects had been completed and closed. A new project, Working with Families Phase 3, had also been brought into the programme, whilst two existing projects had been removed to be pursued as separate initiatives. The removal of these projects had required a reduction of £2.2m in the targeted savings for 2014/15 as these savings would now be delivered by departments outside of the OC programme. Currently, there were ten live projects left to deliver, encompassing some of the larger and more complicated projects. The Brent One Oracle project which had been rated Red in May 2013, due to risks relating to internal resourcing, had now progressed to Amber. This was being delivered in partnership with five other councils and timescales and scope of work remained challenging. The Parking Enforcement Review project was at present the only project with a red status. This red rating reflected the difficulties with the introduction of the new online service. It was noted that the project delivery had been strengthened and Brent staff were working closely with the new service provider to address the issues.

Irene Bremang explained that new internal governance arrangements for the OC programme had been established in June 2013, following changes to the senior management structure of the council. The interim Chief Executive was now the OC Programme Sponsor and the Corporate Management Team (CMT) now acted as the OC Strategic Programme Board. Portfolio projects and general programme matters were the responsibility of a refreshed OC Programme Delivery Board chaired by the Strategic Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods. The committee was further advised that the programme was on track to deliver the additional £10.2m savings targeted for 2013/14 and this was being robustly monitored by the Programme Board. The costs of the programme had decreased, reflecting the focus on using internal resources to delivery projects and only making use of consultants when specialist input was required. The costs were also

reduced as there were fewer live projects (10 projects) still be completed in the programme.

During Members' subsequent discussion it was noted that the council had to deliver significant savings in the forthcoming years and a member queried how these would be achieved. Further details were also sought on the impact of the reduction in programme costs on the delivery of the remaining live projects. In response, the committee was advised that the One Council Programme would deliver approximately 70 per cent of the required savings. There were other initiatives involving service or staff reduction that would address the remaining 30 per cent and which did not require the complex management support that the OC programme provided. Irene Bremang added that the resources of the programme were adequate to deliver the remaining projects and that discussions had started on the next set of projects for the OC Programme beyond 2014.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

8. One Council Overview and Scrutiny work programme.

Councillor Jones outlined an issue to the committee regarding the application of incorrect council tax banding of converted properties, advising that it warranted further investigation. She explained that council tax banding was determined by the assessment of the Valuation Office and that where one property had been converted into multiple dwellings, a new assessment was required before the correct council tax banding could be applied. Councillor Jones highlighted that this issue resulted in a loss of council tax income and suggested that a small team of officers be directed to look at this issue.

Cathy Tyson explained that a cost-effective solution was required and noted that a similar stream of work was being undertaken by the licensing teams. The committee welcomed Councillor Jones suggestion and advised that she raise the issue with Andy Donald, Director of Regeneration and Growth, for further consideration.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

9. Date of next meeting

The committee noted that the next meeting was scheduled for 26 November 2013.

10. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 9.12 pm

J Ashraf
Chair