



MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES AND PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Wednesday 4 December 2019 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillor Kelcher (Chair), Councillors Choudhary, Gbajumo, Johnson, Kabir, Nerva and Stephens

Also Present: Councillors McLennan, Hirani, Sheth and Tatler.
Darren Philips - General Manager of Ibis Hotel, London Wembley

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Aden and Mashari.

2. Declarations of interests

None

3. Deputations (if any)

None

4. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 12 September 2019 be approved as a correct record.

5. Matters arising (if any)

Concerning trees, Cllr Nerva undertook to provide an update at the next meeting.

6. Chair's Report

The Committee considered the Chair's report, which set out details regarding the selection of topics for the current meeting, as well as, work undertaken by the Committee outside of public meetings.

RESOLVED that the Chair's report be noted.

6.1 Order of Business

At this juncture, the Committee agreed to amend the order of business to proceed to first take *'item 10 - Air Quality Report'* and then *'item 9 - Tourism in Brent'*, before

reverting to the other agenda items as listed on the agenda. For ease of reference, minutes are listed in the order as agenda items appeared on the agenda.

7. Annual Complaints Report

Cllr McLennan, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources introduced the report highlighting the purpose of the report.

Thomas Cattermole (Head of Executive and Member Services) contributed to the introduction noting the annual performance on complaints in Brent for the period from April 2018 to March 2019.

In considering the report, the Committee noted the following points:

- The Cabinet at its meeting on 11 November 2019 considered the Complaints Annual Report 2018 - 2019. The report focused on the nature of complaints, the learning and improvements from complaints and Ombudsmen (Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman / Housing Ombudsman) cases.
- Complaints concerning Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care came under separate statutory complaint procedures and relevant summary reports dealing with these areas had been provided in Appendices A and B of the report respectively.
- A summary of the root causes of all Stage 1 complaints and improvement actions by Council departments in 2018/19 was provided in Appendix C of the report.
- Stage 2 complaint volume was down by 8% and complaints turn-around time had improved.
- Overall, the top three specific root causes of complaints in Brent concerned Parking (10%), Repairs (9%), and Customer Care (9%).
- All Brent Stage 1 complaints (corporate & statutory) had increased by 20%.
- All Brent Stage 2 complaints (corporate & statutory) had decreased by 8%.
- 64% of Brent Council complaints were categorised as 'service failure' in 2018/19, compared with 59% in the previous year.
- 23 Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) cases were upheld against Brent in 2018/19, compared with 21 cases in 2017/18.
- The total amount of compensation paid by Brent decreased by 17% in 2018/19 compared with the previous year of circa. £61.3k.
- The total number of cases awarded compensation increased by 4% compared with the previous year figure of 141 cases.

During the discussion and questions raised by the Committee, the following key areas were spotlighted upon:

- Concerning a query about the Council receiving the second-highest amount of Stage 2 complaints, the Committee was informed that in nine out of twenty-three cases, the Council acknowledged the issues within the process but the complainants, a few from the same family, still chose to approach the LGO and the complaints were upheld. The Council wanted to improve the performance in this area and fully recognised the situation therefore this area was actively being reviewed at the highest level with a clear aim to make positive progress next year. The Committee heard that the new customer relationship management and monitoring system being introduced now would also be useful in addressing the issue. The Committee was informed that all relevant stage 2 complaints were being looked at by the Chief Executive.
- A Member highlighted that some of the residents were complaining to her that it was difficult to get hold of housing and social services on the phone. The Chair also enquired as to what steps were being taken to bridge the 4% gap in order to achieve the 100% target set out in the report. In response, the Committee heard that the Council was looking to merge the two contact centres and bringing them on the same platform to provide consistency and improvement by the middle of next year. The Committee asked that key civic issues relating to accessibility, disability and language barriers (for those whose first language was not English) should be carefully considered in any new portal. The Committee heard that new portal had gone through extensive testing and in addition to the online access; residents could call the relevant section, write in or see a person as well as use a local hub.
- Concerning a query about the difference between corporate and statutory complaints, the Committee noted that 'statutory complaints' were stipulated in legislation along with the detail about the process as to how it should be practised by local authorities whereas other areas of complaints that did not have specific regulations about the practice generally tended to be corporate complaints.
- Operational Director or Head of Service reviewed the complaints before these being escalated to Stage 2.

RESOLVED that the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee note Brent Council's performance in managing and resolving complaints.

8. **Data Led Service Delivery**

Cllr McLennan, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources, introduced the report and highlighted its key themes. She welcomed the report noting that the data led delivery approach would help the staff and professionals. She added that any sensitivities would be carefully monitored, particularly how the data was being kept, reviewed and used.

Peter Gadsdon, Strategic Director of Customer and Digital Services, added that the Council's approach to using data to target services, to improve service delivery and

how this provision would be developed as part of the programme of work to implement the Brent Digital Strategy 2019-23.

In considering the report, the Committee noted the following:

- Local Authorities, including Brent, would have to meet increasing demand whilst delivering accessible services for residents. The latest population projections indicated that by 2041 Brent's population was expected to grow by 25% (faster than the London average of 22% representing an increase of 84,800 Brent residents). Alongside this rise in the population, Brent would also be affected by an increase in the number of residents aged over 65 as highlighted in figure 1 of the report. In this context, it was vital that Brent used data to plan and focused resources to ensure that the best value services could continue to be provided for our residents.
- The Council's 2019-23 Digital Strategy recognised the benefits of effectively using data to design service models around user-needs to better prevent and respond in ways, which were not previously possible.
- Working in collaboration with all London Authorities, Brent was contributing to Smart London Plan outlining a digital strategy for the city by building a coalition to enable boroughs to join forces, share data and improve London's digital services.

During the ensuing discussion as well as question and answer session, the following points were noted:

- The Chair and a Member informed the Committee that they attended a very useful workshop on this topic.
- The Committee heard a number of queries and concerns from Members about the long-term goal of the scheme, quality of data, as well as, security, potential misuse of a predictive element, bias, general assumption and being used against a certain community. In response, the Committee heard from Peter Gadsdon that Brent fully recognised the importance of keeping data secure ensuring citizen's identities were protected. In addition, careful consideration of ethical issues inherent in using data in new and innovative ways was a key part of the process. The 'single view' approach of a child in safeguarding was cited as a good example that did not override the specialist knowledge and professional judgements instead it would help professionals in arriving at an informed decision.
- Brent was embarking on a trailblazing journey, as a member of LOTI (London Office of Technology and Innovation), in which Brent, alongside fifteen other London Boroughs, was establishing a Data Ethics Board which would consist of diverse and well respected representation from academia, NHS, residential/community sector and members etc. to ensure professional input and robust safeguards.
- Data quality strategy would set out minimum standards and provide continuous improvement in future. Brent was not currently sharing its data due

to GDPR, lack of data sharing agreements, as well as, due to intention of use and social good elements and work with LOTI would be a helpful starting point on this journey.

- Clients, customers, residents particularly young people should also be asked what was required or missing. Although exciting development, it was critical to get it right.
- A Member enquired as to what benefits, if any, were there for councillors in this scheme and how could they access appropriate data to be more efficient in discharging their duties and role. In response, it was heard that Brent Open Data website at <https://data.brent.gov.uk/> was the place where the data was being placed and councillors could look at, understand and drill down the appropriate information. More information, including Members sessions would be available in due course.
- Customer Service Access Refresh would allow smart phone and handheld device compatibility.
- The process would an extensive authentication process according the information or access required. Security by design concept was embedded in the scheme as advised by third parties.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the report.

9. **Tourism in Brent**

Councillor Tatler introduced the report. She highlighted its key themes, including that this was generally a neglected area, and a detailed report was a welcome development. She touched upon the context of tourism in Brent - key assets, current positive activities.

Matt Dibben, Head of Employment, Skills and Enterprise, provided further details. The report provided a response to the key lines of enquiry identified in section three of the report. Highlighting the opportunities and key themes, he invited the Committee to consider Brent's approach to tourism and provide any comments.

Darren Philips - General Manager of Ibis Hotel, Wembley, provided his professional insight and comments.

In considering the report and during the discussion, the Committee noted the following key comments:

- Brent had a strong and diverse tourism offer across the borough, which would come to the fore through the London Borough of Culture 2020. The Borough was also increasingly being championed through Town Centre Management and local businesses using campaigns such as Small Business Saturday Awards, a Shop Local Campaign, and town centre marketing collateral including videos for a social media campaign.

- The Inclusive Growth Strategy highlighted a number of potential interventions to increase tourism to Brent, including the need to maximise – on a continuous basis - the impacts of key assets such as those in Wembley, as well as, finding new ways to engage visitors.
- Question 7 referred to lobbying the government to allow a “tourist tax” in the borough. However, it was noted that any legally enforceable tourist tax would require new primary legislation in Parliament before it could be implemented. Although, there were examples of authorities and other bodies introducing voluntary donations added to the bills of hotel guests such as the introduction in July 2014 by the London Borough of Hackney of a voluntary £1 per night donation and a £2 per night donation introduced in the Lake District.
- Brent Community Toilet Strategy, like in other local authorities, to be put in place to help visitors and others as part of this work.
- A list of assets to be refreshed taking into consideration feedback from all stakeholders, particularly neighbours, ward councillors and local residents. The Committee requested that, as an evolving and a dynamic document, the list of assets to be updated with a view to bring neighbours, local stakeholders and promotion of key local geographical elements and places of interests and potential.
- Member information session on this topic to be arranged to provide information to councillors and to seek direct feedback and comments.
- Detail about a specialist tourism industry related educational/vocational institute in Brent that provides qualification and recognised awards. In addition, how does it link in with schools and apprentices.
- A list of appropriate, relevant apprentice, training, educational and vocational qualifications be coiled and efforts be made to have a coordinated approach that brings together all relevant strands together.
- The Environment around attractions - public transport, accessibility and greenspaces - should be a key feature in any tourism approach as well as a part of wider model shift.
- A lot of work was being done to have a successful street party in Brent in 2020.
- Darren Philips, General Manager of Ibis Hotel, London Wembley, informed that, overall, visitors coming for a stadium event did not stay in Wembley and the stay had been declining in last 3 and 4 years which was very event-centric, if more attractions were highlighted this would help the local economy and hotels as well. Highlighting recent Christmas emphasis and exposure, he added that advance and focused publicity through social media worked well. In addition, leaflets at key locations and other channels should be considered but Brent must catch the visitors’ attention before they arrive and make bookings. He added that the majority of his staff were based around Wembley

and he appreciated the benefits of providing employment and opportunities to local people who in turn could then grow and develop further.

Councillor Tatler thanked the Committee for their input and feedback. She added that by working together on Brand Brent using Borough of Culture theme would be a good step forward and a lot of work was already underway.

[Cllr Nerva left the meeting at 6:45 pm]

RESOLVED:

That, having received evidence from the Cabinet Member Regeneration, Property & Planning, the Cabinet Member Public Health, Culture & Leisure, lead officers for tourism, and a representative from the local hospitality sector, the committee recommends that:

1. The Council produce and promote a Tourism Strategy for Brent to articulate a clear vision for tourism in Brent and which builds on the borough's unique local brands and aims to increase tourism, maximise the benefits of tourism and mitigate against the negative externalities.
2. The Council utilise the London Borough of Culture 2020 brand and publicity as a launch pad to create and advertise a comprehensive tourism offer, identifying and promoting the particular potential tourist attractions in neighbourhoods around the borough, including, food and dining experiences, festivals and street art.
3. The Council undertake a local survey to collect up to date information on tourism patterns to inform the tourism strategy.
4. The Council identify unique aspects of local areas to inform the tourism strategy, marketing them through wider place-promotion.
5. The Council improve the public realm space around key tourist attractions and gateway locations, including a review of the transport nodes, upgrading physical infrastructure and leisure facilities for tourists, signposting to provide clear directions and accessible information about attractions and places of interest.
6. The Council's tourism strategy include strategies to capture and retain Wembley event footfall and spend in the borough.
7. The Council work with regulatory and enforcement partners (police, highways and licensing) to adopt a fresh approach to pre and post-event activity, to maximise the economic and social benefits of footfall in the area by allowing people to spend time using the food, drink, leisure and shopping facilities surrounding the Stadium and Arena and to mitigate against and manage any negative externalities such as environmental impact, crowd control, crime and anti-social behaviour.
8. The Council should develop a community toilet strategy, with accessibility for public in mind, with this information.

The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee also made the following requests:

- a. As an evolving document, the list of assets to be updated with a view to bring neighbouring councils and local stakeholders together and to promote key local elements and places of interests.
- b. A councillor information session on this topic to be arranged to provide information to councillors and to seek feedback and comments.
- c. Details be provided about a specialist tourism industry related educational/vocational institute in Brent that provided qualification and recognised awards and how did it link with schools and apprentices.

[The Committee agreed to have a 5-minute comfort break at 7.03 pm.]

10. Air Quality Scrutiny Report

Councillor Thomas Stephens, Chair of Air Quality Scrutiny Task Group of Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee introduced the report.

The purpose of the report was to present the Air Quality Scrutiny Task Group Report for adoption by the Committee attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Cllr Stephens highlighted that air quality was a huge public health challenge that many have failed to keep pace with advancement in science and it had been neglected in the past. He added that he was pleased to present a very comprehensive Air Quality Task Group report and appreciated the worked of all those who helped and contributed. The recommendations were set out in the scrutiny report.

Councillor Krupa Sheth, Lead Member for Environment, thanked the Air Quality Task Group of the Committee for their work, updates and welcomed the recommendations. She stated that air quality was a key priority for Brent and her as a responsible Cabinet Member and was two of the most pressing concerns along with climate emergency. A joined up approach and raising awareness, working positively with stakeholder would make a difference in this area.

In considering the report and during the discussion, the following key comments were noted:

- In response to a question from a Member about the Council's use of asphalt and other materials being substituted with environmentally friendly materials, the Lead Member for Environment stated that the Council was reviewing the overall situation as part of climate emergency work and this aspect would be considered as port of that work.
- A Member congratulated the Chair of Task Group on this piece of work. He thanked the Lead Member responsible and asked that implementation of recommendations agreed by the Cabinet be monitored and reviewed.

- The Chair suggested that a follow-up report be brought back to the Committee in the next municipal year, following a full Council debate on this topic.
- Idling engine/pollution concerns - The Council had to warn before any fines, which were set at a low level.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Air Quality Scrutiny Report and recommendations be adopted and referred to the Cabinet for consideration.
2. That the implementation of the report's recommendations agreed by the Cabinet be brought back to the Committee for review in 2020-2021.

The Committee suggested that a debate on air quality should be held at full council before the end of the municipal year. It was also requested that the Cabinet Member bring the forthcoming Air Quality Strategy to the Resources & Public Realm Scrutiny Committee for pre-scrutiny when available.

11. Recommendations Tracker

The Chair introduced the Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker table (Appendix 1 of the report), which tracked the progress of recommendations made by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

The Resources and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee notes the progress of the previous recommendations of the Committee.

12. Any other urgent business

None

The meeting closed at 19:57 hours

M KELCHER
Chair

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