



Brent

**MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES AND PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**Held in the Conference Hall, Brent Civic Centre on Monday 18 December 2023 at**  
**6.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Long (Vice-Chair in the Chair) and Councillors Aden, Ahmadi Moghaddam, Akram, S Butt, Georgiou, Molloy and J.Patel.

Also Present: Councillor Tatler (Deputy Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources & Reform and Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Growth) and Councillor Lorber (representing the members who had called-in the decision for review).

**1. Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

Apologies were received from Councillors Conneely, Miller, Mitchell and Shah with Councillor Molloy in attendance as an alternate member for Councillor Conneely.

Councillor Ahmadi Moghaddam was present for the majority of the meeting, however had to leave due to unforeseen circumstances prior to the final decision being made on the outcome of the call-in.

**2. Declarations of interests**

The following interests were declared by members of the Committee in relation to Item 3 (Call-In Cabinet Decision (16 November 23) – Sudbury Town Residents Association (STRA) application for Neighbourhood Forum status):

- Councillor Georgiou declared a personal interest as one of the Councillors who had signed the call-in request form.
- Councillor S. Butt declared a personal interest as a former Sudbury Ward Councillor from 2018-2022.

No other interests were declared at the meeting.

**3. Call-In: Cabinet decision (16 November 23) - Sudbury Town Residents Association (STRA) application for Neighbourhood Forum status**

In opening the item, the Chair advised that the meeting had been arranged, in accordance with Standing Order 14, to consider a call-in submitted by five members of the Council in relation to a decision made by Cabinet on 16 November 2023 to refuse the Sudbury Town Residents Association's application for Neighbourhood Forum status.

In considering the call-in the Chair reminded the Committee that lines of questioning must remain specifically within the remit of the call-in and that issues raised on anything wider would not be valid and ruled out for consideration.

Having clarified the basis of the call-in, the Chair then proceeded to invite Councillor Lorber to outline the reasons for the call-in as representative of the members who had supported its submission.

In presenting the call-in, Councillor Lorber highlighted the following key issues for the Committee as a basis for the call-in which had been submitted:

- The decision taken by Cabinet had meant there was currently no authorised Neighbourhood Forum in Sudbury.
- Sudbury Town Resident Association (STRA) had previously been very active in the community, not only in terms of developing a local plan in collaboration with Brent Council officers but also in representing local people in relation to planning issues and environmental improvements, as well as protecting Barham Park.
- Concerns were raised that consultation in relation to making the decision on STRA's status as a Neighbourhood Forum was not carried out with due diligence as it was felt ward councillors had not been adequately informed or included within the process.
- The limited number of responses to the reported consultation was felt to be representative of the fact that there had not, in the view of the members who had called-in the decision, been inadequate wider consultation with the public.
- Concerns were also raised about STRA not having been invited or informed about the Cabinet meeting on 16 November 2023 when the final decision to refuse their application had been decided.
- It was highlighted that STRA and Brent Council officers had previously enjoyed a positive working relationship until complaints from local councillors had been made in 2018/19. It was felt that after this point a communication breakdown had occurred; as such, it was questioned whether local politics had played a part in undermining STRA as a local Neighbourhood Forum.
- It was queried why council officers had not made a more concerted effort to discuss concerns with STRA ahead of their Neighbourhood Forum application having been recommended for refusal.
- It was felt that the separate application from Sudbury Matters to create a new Neighbourhood Forum covering the area should have been considered at the same time as STRA's application so that both parties could be considered equitably.
- On the basis of the concerns raised Councillor Lorber felt the original decision taken to refuse the application needed to be referred back to Cabinet for re-consideration.

The Chair thanked Councillor Lorber for presenting the call-in and invited Committee Members to ask any clarifying queries they had.

The following points were discussed:

- The Committee sought further details on how the consultation and decision to refuse STRA's application for Neighbourhood Forum status had been communicated to ward councillors. In response, Councillor Lorber advised that as Sudbury ward councillor he did not feel he had been kept informed about the public consultation or been directly engaged in the process and once again highlighted concerns at the thoroughness and outcome with only 23

responses received. In relation to the decision taken by Cabinet, Councillor Lorber advised that he was only aware after the decision had been made and had not received direct prior notification that a decision was due to be taken at the Cabinet meeting on 16 November 2023.

- In response to a further query, Councillor Lorber advised he was unaware whether the Chair of STRA had been notified ahead of the decision being made at Cabinet.
- Councillor Lorber shared that he was aware that Sudbury Matters had also applied for Neighbourhood Forum status, however he was unaware of the progress made with that application and why it had subsequently been withdrawn.
- Following a Committee query in relation to the effectiveness of the mediation process established to seek a joint solution between STRA and Sudbury Matters in relation to Neighbourhood Forum status, Councillor Lorber advised that he had not directly been involved with this and therefore felt unable to comment.
- The Committee queried if there was a requirement to notify ward councillors of pending decisions due to be taken by Cabinet in relation to matters impacting on their ward. In response Debra Norman, Corporate Director of Governance advised that there was no specific requirement to proactively notify ward councillors.
- The Committee queried the impact felt by Sudbury residents as a result of not having a Neighbourhood Forum over the past year since STRA's status had expired. Councillor Lorber advised that it was difficult to comment on the full impact, however, it was felt that the way the Council had managed consideration of STRA's application to renew their Neighbourhood Forum status had been poorly handled and ineffective for local residents.

As there were no further questions for Councillor Lorber at this point, the Chair thanked him for his responses and invited Councillor Tatler as Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning & Growth to respond to the matters raised within the call-in.

Councillor Tatler highlighted the following key points:

- It was not the Council's responsibility to create Neighbourhood Forums, which needed to be community led and representative of the area they covered, as well as having the capacity to be run effectively.
- It was not felt that STRA, in its current capacity, were able to perform this role sufficiently for Sudbury residents given concerns relating to their transparency, accessibility and diversity as an organisation along with what was considered to be a lack of focus on neighbourhood planning activities or clarity on the distinction between the Forum and wider Resident Association business. This had been the basis on which the decision had been taken by Cabinet to refuse their application for renewed Neighbourhood Forum status.
- In terms of advance notice being provided on the matter prior to its consideration by Cabinet, members were reminded that notice of all items due to be considered by Cabinet was published at least 28 days in advance of each meeting on the Forward Plan. All members received notification when the Forward Plan was published and it was therefore felt this should have provided adequate notice of the item prior to its consideration by Cabinet.

- STRA had been notified about concerns in relation to their application for Neighbourhood Forum status and had been given opportunities to respond and engage with officers in relation to the issues identified. The process has also included the opportunity to take part in external mediation in order to address the concerns raised and also work collectively with Sudbury Matters on the potential to create a Forum for the benefit of Sudbury residents. Despite repeated efforts from officers, no further approaches had been received from STRA to engage in the process.
- On the basis of the points outlined, Councillor Tatler therefore felt the decision taken by Cabinet had been the correct approach with the Committee therefore urged to consider upholding the original decision made to refuse STRAs application for Neighbourhood Forum status.

The Chair thanked Councillor Tatler for her comments and then opened up the debate for the Committee to seek responses on any clarifying queries they had, prior to a final decision being made on the outcome of the call-in.

The following points were discussed:

- Following a Committee query in relation to the consultation and engagement that took place in considering STRA's application for Neighbourhood Forum status, officers advised that there had initially been good engagement with STRA with it noted that the officers had attended STRA's AGM in May 2022 along with a bespoke meeting to discuss the process for constituting and re-applying for Neighbourhood Forum status. Despite the guidance and advice provided, their final application had not been received until the end of December 2022 following expiry of their Forum status. Following this, consultation on the application had started in January 2023, with website notifications, an email to all local ward councillors in the area covered by the Forum and a notice on the Members Bulletin. No existing councillors had responded to the consultation.
- In view of the limited public response to the consultation, the Committee sought further details on the breadth of the public engagement process with it noted that standard practice, as had been followed in this instance, was to notify subscribers to the Local Plan Database about the consultation process.
- In terms of local ward councillors being notified, the Committee recognised the email communication which had been sent and supported, as ongoing good practice, notification being provided individually for ward councillors of important issues affecting their ward, in addition to general notices in the Members Bulletin.
- The Committee queried how STRA were specifically informed about the consultation. In response officers advised that STRA would have received an email notification as they were on the Local Plan Consultation Database. On this basis, officers had not felt it necessary to send STRA further additional notification they had previously demonstrated experience in responding to consultations including those related to their previous Neighbourhood Forum applications.
- Members also noted the significant dialogue that had taken place between officers and STRA following submission of their initial application with it confirmed that STRA had also been notified about the alternative application for Forum status submitted by Sudbury Matters. It was at this point that

- officers had suggested mediation as a way forward in seeking to create a combined Neighbourhood Forum that would best serve the local community.
- In response to a query, the Committee was advised that mediation support had been sought from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities in order to support the two groups in progressing plans for one Neighbourhood Forum that could best represent the local community. Whilst both groups had initially agreed to work together, STRA had subsequently not played any active role in the process.
  - Following a Committee query in relation to the status of the Sudbury Matters Neighbourhood Forum application, the Committee was advised that following withdrawal of their initial application a revised submission had been received based on a new name. Officers were, however, awaiting the outcome of the call-in process on the Cabinet decision to refuse STRAs application before being able to progress the new application further.
  - The Committee was advised that if, following consultation, it was felt the new Forum's application was able to successfully serve the interests of Sudbury residents Cabinet could be asked to consider the application by March / April 2024.

As no further comments were raised, the Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the discussion.

Having considered the grounds for the call-in and response provided at the meeting in outlining the basis for the decision and process followed in relation to its consideration the Committee, having considered the options available under the call-process, indicated they were minded to confirm rather than refer back the original decision taken by Cabinet to refuse the application received from Sudbury Town Residents Association for Neighbourhood Forum status.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** as a final outcome of the call-in to confirm the original decision made by Cabinet on 16 November 2023 to refuse the application received from Sudbury Town Residents Association for Neighbourhood Forum status with it noted that the decision would therefore take immediate effect following the meeting.

#### 4. **Any other urgent business**

None.

Date of the next meeting: Wednesday 24 January 2024

The meeting closed at 7:24 pm

COUNCILLOR JANICE LONG  
Vice Chair in the Chair