



Brent

MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES AND PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday 1 October 2020 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Mashari (Chair), Councillor Kansagra (Vice-Chair) and Councillors S Choudhary, Johnson, Kabir, Long, Mahmood, Miller, Perrin and Shah

Also Present: Councillors McLennan (Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources), Knight (Lead Member for Community Safety & Engagement) and Donnelly-Jackson.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hassan.

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 14 July 2020 be approved as a correct record.

5. **Matters arising (if any)**

None.

6. **Violence Against Women Scrutiny (Task Group) Report**

Councillor Donnelly-Jackson introduced a report on the Violence Against Women Scrutiny Task Group. The Committee was then invited to raise questions on the report, which focused on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- It was suggested that the report should not be the final piece of work that the Committee undertakes on the issue of violence against women and girls, as it was an evolving issue that could not be solved quickly. Its recommendations should be tracked to ensure they were effectively carried out.
- In response to a question from the Committee, it was noted that while levels of violence against women were generally higher in areas of deprivation, some evidence suggested that there was under reporting of instances such

as coercive control and financial control in areas of affluence. However, the need to target resources to areas of high prevalence was recognised.

- It was noted that the task group had engaged with the Council's Housing Management team regarding refuges for women in the borough. Some of the requirements for housing younger women was restrictive, and as such it was suggested that the Council considered the need for women's refuges in its future housing plans.
- The members of the task group would have liked to have seen more engagement with a wider group of stakeholders including religious organisations. However, due to the impact of the pandemic fewer responses than expected had been received. The Committee was assured that religious organisations would be consulted before the recommendations agreed by Cabinet were implemented.
- It was noted that engagement with ethnic minorities had been lower than expected, again due to the impact of the pandemic. As such, data on the prevalence of violence against women within these demographic was limited. However, some reasons as to why prevalence may be higher in these groups were highlighted, such as cultural and religious views towards the status of women.
- It was noted that the report recommended that audits be carried out to identify risks for premises where women needed to access support services. This would cover a range of safety risks, such as hygiene, disabled access and public disorder.

Councillor Knight, Lead Member for Community Safety & Engagement, then summarised the Cabinet response to the report as follows:

- The task group's findings were useful when considering the priorities of the Safer Brent Partnership, in particular its first priority which was to reduce the prevalence of domestic and sexual abuse towards women.
- The pandemic had put extraordinary pressures on services and additional risk to many vulnerable groups including women and girls, and the task group's findings had further outlined the need for protection from domestic abuse and violence.
- The department was committed to taking the task group's recommendations forward should the Committee adopt them, and to carefully considering the Cabinet's executive response to provide clear commitments against the recommendations.
- Cabinet would also consider how it would share the task group's findings with partner organisations within the Safer Brent Partnership.

Resolved

That the Violence Against Women Scrutiny report and recommendations be adopted and referred to Cabinet for consideration.

7. Building a Better Brent

Councillor McLennan, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources, introduced a report on the delivery of the Council's policies and strategies including the Borough Plan. The Committee was then invited to raise questions on the report, which focused on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- It was noted that the Council was looking to extend selective licensing in the future. Should this not be possible, it would look at alternative measures as it was seen as important way in which residents were supported. Borough-wide licensing, however, was not currently possible.
- House building had continued throughout the pandemic, though it had been delayed. The Council's view was that there would be no long-term implications to the housing programme, though the exact timeline of the delays was no yet known.
- The need to help residents to progress their careers was recognised. The Council itself had the highest number of apprenticeships in the country, spanning across a range of departments such as planning, finance and procurement. Education was seen as key to attainment, as was the types work being offered across the borough.
- While work was being done to increase the attainment level of young people across the borough, particular focus was given to black boys of Caribbean heritage as their attainment levels were proportionally lower. The Council had significantly narrowed this gap in attainment since the Borough Plan was implemented, and it was noted that there had not been an exclusion of a black boy of Caribbean heritage in primary school settings in the past year.
- It was noted that there had been a delay to the installation of electric vehicles points across the borough. The Council was currently renegotiating its contract with its supplier, Source London, and the Committee was assured that there would be no negative impact as a result of the delay.
- It was suggested that the Council considered the use of key performance indicators in monitoring the amount of illegal dumping in the borough.
- It was noted that several policies and strategies had been brought forward since the Borough Plan was first agreed, all of which were being built into the plan in the near future. The Committee was assured that the proposals for the review of the Borough Plan would be brought to a meeting of the Committee early next year. Regarding the action plans the Council was currently pursuing, it was noted that audit and review processes were already underway to ensure their aims would be delivered.

- It was suggested that officers should review the use of contextual measures within the Borough Plan, as well as the Online Watch Link (OWL) system in relation to neighbourhood watches. The use of yearly performance metrics, focused on clear outcomes, was encouraged.

Resolved

The Committee made the following information requests:

- 1. An assessment of the impact of the COVID19 pandemic on the Council's house building programme.**
- 2. Data on the attainment of all pupils across all categories in Brent.**
- 3. The number of permanent exclusions made for SEN pupils in Brent.**
- 4. The number of work placements or apprenticeships made for SEN pupils.**
- 5. A timeline for review and assessment on progress in achieving the Council's Healthy Neighbourhood scheme targets.**
- 6. The cost to the Council resulting from the delay in installation of electric vehicle charging points.**
- 7. An assessment and consideration of whether there should be a target (KPI) to reduce the amount of illegal dumping.**
- 8. A report on the proposals for the review of the Borough Plan to be brought before the Committee early next year.**
- 9. A report of the progress on the implementation of the Council's key strategies, including RAG rated indicators.**
- 10. A report on the implementation of the Council's priorities, including contextual information on the delivery of key priorities.**

8. Budget Scrutiny

Councillor McLennan, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources, introduced a report on the Council's budget performance and the implementation of the 2020 budget scrutiny recommendations. The Committee was then invited to raise questions on the report, which focused on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- It was noted that there had been around a £23 million loss of income and around £14 million of costs as a result of the pandemic. The cost of personal protective equipment (PPE) was estimated at around £3 million, and around £1.3 million was spent on costs relating to shielding.
- The pandemic had highlighted the areas in which the Council needed to target its funding in the future, such as on poverty and health inequalities. In response to a question from the Committee, it was noted that targeting funding in this way would allow the Council to assess outcomes and measure success in a way that had not been possible in its immediate response to the pandemic.
- No assurances could be given as to level of funding for individual departments of the Council, including those that relate to the environment. Each department would put forward its own set of savings, which would be considered when the budget was set. The importance of balancing the

budget was emphasised, as was the Council's commitment to its environmental priorities.

- It was noted that the budget had been delayed because there was uncertainty about the level of funding it would receive from central government and about the costs of the pandemic going forward. The situation was ongoing and the Council was having to react to new information from central government, and the course of the pandemic itself, quickly and efficiently.
- Should the costs for the current financial year be unmet by central government or in-year savings, the Council would need to look to its reserves. The Council was hesitant to use capital contributions to revenue because it would still need to pay back that capital over a long period.
- In response to a question from the Committee, it was noted that the Council would be engaging with the public about the possibility of cuts and the impact it could have on them. The Communications team would be leading on this within the Council, and the Labour Group would also be working with members to look at the ways in which they could share the message. The Committee was also assured that members would be involved in the budget setting process.
- The Committee was assured that any proposals to cut expenditure would involve detailed equality impact assessments which would ensure that the impact on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable residents in the borough had been carefully examined.
- It was noted that the impact of the removal of free travel for under 18s in London was an important consideration for all local authorities across the city. The Council had joined others in pressing central government to reverse the decision and/or cover its immediate costs. It was currently unclear whether the Council would face any additional costs as a result of the implementation of this policy.
- It was noted that £3.3 million had been received from central government for the discretionary grants scheme, all of which was set to be spent. The funding would reach 561 small and medium-sized local business across the borough.
- It was forecasted that the Council would receive 3-4% less income from council tax receipts than the previous year as a result of the pandemic. While central government would not reimburse local authorities for the loss of collection, it had allowed them to repay their collection deficit over three years as opposed to one. Council tax support had also reduced the amount of tax local authorities were able to collect, and it was unclear when this policy would end.

Resolved

The Committee made the following information requests:

1. **A breakdown of the £37.4 million of costs and loss of income referenced at paragraph 4.3 of the report.**
2. **How the Council reviews the delivery and value for money of the shared NHS/Local Authority budgeted initiatives in the integrated social care system.**

9. **Brent Council Procurement Strategy**

Councillor McLennan, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources, introduced a report on the Council's Procurement Strategy 2020-23. The Committee was then invited to raise questions on the report, which focused on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- In response to a question from the Committee, it was noted that the Council's policy towards modern slavery could be found in its new Social Value and Ethical Procurement Policy, which formed part of the overall Procurement Strategy. It made clear the standards the Council had of the suppliers that it worked with. The Committee were assured that audits were also undertaken to ensure suppliers were abiding by these standards.
- It was noted that while the Social Value and Ethical Procurement Policy was Brent specific, other local authorities were expected to be working towards similar policies. The Committee was assured that any procurement work undertaken with partners, such as those in the West London Alliance, would be subject to the Council's policy should they not have their own.
- While the Council had its own fair trade policy, it had to be selective when extending this policy to partners and suppliers as it had a responsibility to ensure cost effectiveness.
- It was noted that the Council was looking at ways in which it could help communities to be involved in the ways in which it purchases its services and goods. The Committee was assured that an individual project lead, departmental leaders and the Black Cultural Network within the Council had been designated to take the recommendations of the Brent Black Community Action Plan forward, and these would be integrated into its procurement work.
- The Council was looking to work with members to see what social value meant to them and how it could engage with local businesses and organisations to ensure social value was a consideration.
- The Committee was assured that should a supplier be found to be in breach of the Council's Social Value and Ethical Procurement Policy, it had the ability to take action accordingly to address that. The Council also had a responsibility in its due diligence work to ensure it was asking the right questions of suppliers so that it could ensure it did not happen or that it was quickly rectified.

- It was suggested that the Council should look to award its future contracts to smaller businesses, and that it look into how Council contracts be made available to local suppliers. It was also suggested that those contracts up for renewal within the next two to three years be subject to the same process.
- It was noted that the Procurement Strategy lacked detailed information on how contracts would be monitored and that this would be looked at before it was taken to Cabinet. One of the processes it sought to bring in was a review process of each contract 18 months before it was due to be let.

Resolved

That it be recommended to Cabinet;

- 1. That the Council's policy on modern slavery be published on the Council website.**
- 2. That Brent Council's Procurement Strategy include how fair trade is to be delivered.**
- 3. To consider how Council contracts may be made available to local suppliers smaller providers.**

The Committee also made the following information requests:

- 1. How modern slavery is to be included in the Council's Procurement Strategy and priorities.**
- 2. How fair trade is to be included in the Council's Procurement Strategy and priorities.**
- 3. A report to the Committee on the West London Alliance's ethical procurement policies.**
- 4. A report to the committee to consider the contracts to be reviewed over the next few years.**
- 5. A report to the Committee on the implementation of the Procurement Strategy at six monthly intervals.**

10. Recommendations Tracker

The Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker table, which tracks the progress of recommendations made by the Committee, was noted. It was also agreed that the Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker would use a red, amber and green (RAG) rating system going forward.

11. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm

R MASHARI
Chair