



Brent

MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES AND PUBLIC REALM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday 10 May 2021 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Mashari, Councillor Kansagra and Councillors Kabir, Johnson, Hassan, Long, Miller, Shah, Conneely and Hylton

Also Present: Councillor Tatler (Lead Member for Regeneration, Property and Planning)

In remote attendance: Councillor Butt (Leader of the Council), Councillor McLennan (Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Resources), Councillor Knight (Lead Member for Safety and Community Engagement) and Councillor Southwood (Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform)

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

Apologies were received from Councillor Choudhary.

2. **Declarations of interests**

It was noted that Councillor Kabir had a personal (non-pecuniary) interest in item 7 as she was a Trustee of CVS Brent, item 8 as she was Chair of the Knife Crime Scrutiny Task Group and item 9 as she was a member of the Poverty Commission.

It was noted that Councillor Johnson had a personal (non-pecuniary) interest in item 8 as he was a member of the Knife Crime Scrutiny Task Group.

It was also noted that Councillor Miller had a personal (non-pecuniary) interest in item 7 as he was a former Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement and as such worked closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

3. **Deputations (if any)**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 April 2021 be approved as a correct record.

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

Councillor Long asked for more information on the "*Housing repairs and maintenance authority to go out to tender*" decision on Forward Plan 35a. Members noted that this information would be provided following the meeting.

6. Topical Item

Councillor Sheth, Lead Member for Environment and Chris Whyte, Operational Director of Environment Services, introduced the topical item on waste and recycling in the borough. Members noted that the Council had worked with Veolia to run its waste collection and street cleansing services since 2015, during which time they had gained a deep understanding of the borough. Performance levels over this time had been good, with Veolia consistently meeting street cleansing and waste collection targets, despite year on year cost reductions. There had been challenges during the pandemic, such as staff availability issues, yet Veolia had maintained a good and consistent level of service. It was noted that fly tipping remained an issue across the borough, although increased levels may in part be due to the efficiency of the reporting system.

The Committee was then invited to raise questions on the update provided, which focused on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- It was noted that, in the year leading up to April 2020, there were around 44,000 reports of fly-tipping across the borough. From April 2020 to March 2021 the figure was around 31,000. It was thought that the decrease was largely due to residents and businesses being less active during the pandemic.
- In response to a question regarding the action being taken to reduce incidences of fly-tipping, it was noted that the Council carried out programmes of education, carried out visits to locations, conducted surveillance activities, placed signs upon lampposts to act as a deterrent and searched all waste dumped to find evidence that may lead to a fine or prosecution if the offender can be identified.
- Regarding the costs of fly-tipping to the Council, it was noted that the commercial build of the contract with Veolia was structured so that there were no additional costs in relation to waste collection. However, there was the possibility of additional costs for the disposal of waste should levels reach a threshold.
- It was noted that the free waste collection service was made chargeable to make savings. It had so far led to £250,000 of cost savings. It was felt that this change had made the service more efficient and more focused on those residents who needed it the most. Any resident who was in receipt of benefits would be entitled to one free collection per year.
- In response to a question regarding the impact of increased waste collection and disposal on Veolia, it was noted that increased costs in this area may impact performance in other areas. While there were no immediate concerns regarding this, it was recognised that, as a commercial organisation, Veolia would need to address any additional costs however it saw fit.
- It was noted that there were a number of types of waste collections, such as household waste and recycling, garden waste, hazardous waste and household clinical waste. It was recognised that alternative waste collection arrangements were needed for some residents, such as assisted bin collections for the elderly and disabled. Those that did not have access to a vehicle to dispose of waste at their local recycling centre and were unable to meet the cost of a special collection were encouraged to take advantage of their annual free collection if eligible, utilise the help of charities within the

borough which offered waste collection services or request for the community skip to be placed in their area.

- It was noted that waste management services would be reviewed in 2023 and members were encouraged to engage with the review. Central government were also looking to implement new policy which would ask producers to take on a bigger role in disposing of their products, for example through 'Take Back' schemes.
- In response to a question regarding the operation of recycling sites during the pandemic, it was noted that they had remained open but were operating at a limited capacity to ensure compliancy with Covid-related restrictions and that appointments needed to be booked online. The Council had not received any complaints about appointments being unavailable and the recycling sites had been busy and used well.
- Regarding recycling facilities for blocks of flats, it was noted that over 300 flats across the borough had access to recycling facilities. The Council always sought to provide recycling facilities unless logistically unviable. Members were encouraged to contact the Housing Management Team if they felt that there were any blocks of flats that did not have access to recycling facilities in their ward.
- It was noted that public bins were no longer provided in residential areas. Public bins were still provided across all public parks in the borough, however the increased use of parks during the pandemic had led to many being overfilled. In such cases, arrangements had been made to provide more bins or more regular collections.
- In response to a question regarding how residents were kept updated on the recycling services available to them, it was noted that the Council communicated services to residents through a variety of means including leafleting, its website and Brent Magazine. Residents were also encouraged to use the contact centre should they have any specific queries or concerns.
- Regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the Fly-Tipping Scrutiny Task Group, it was noted that the Council had brought in a number of litter enforcement measures such as the creation of an in-house service for litter enforcement, the deployment of Neighbourhood Patrol Teams to hotspot areas and working partnerships with a number of community organisations such as residents' associations.
- It was noted that the Council did not have a standalone policy on fly-tipping. Whilst it did have an established approach to fly-tipping, it was recognised that there could be value in having such a policy. Members suggested that this option be explored.
- In response to a question regarding cuts to the Environment department over the last few years, it was noted that the main areas of cuts reduction were residential sweeping, removal of residential bins, grass maintenance and the bulky waste service. These cost reductions were implemented after consultation and analysis and the overall impact had been managed successfully. In doing so, the department had been able to contribute to the corporate position in the face of austerity and the pandemic.

It was RESOLVED:

1. That the following areas for improvement be noted;

- (i). To examine a proactive approach to fly tipping.
 - (ii). To improve communications regarding waste disposal for residents that live above businesses.
 - (iii). To monitor the reasons for the Council balancing budgets across services.
2. To make the following information requests;
- (i). To provide contract management data for waste services over this financial year and the previous.
 - (ii). To provide a copy of the route map of fly tipping hotspots across the borough.
 - (iii). To provide a list of the charities offering waste collection across the borough.
 - (iv). To provide details on how many estates across the borough have recycling facilities including Kilburn.
 - (v). To set out an approach to how scrutiny can be involved in scoping the next waste disposal contract.
 - (vi). To provide details on how many council provided on-street bins are in the borough and how that number has changed over the past five years.

7. Brent Voluntary and Community Sector

Councillor Knight, Lead Member for Community Safety and Engagement and Councillor Tatler, Lead Member for Regeneration, Property and Planning introduced a report on the Council's model of collaboration with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), key activity including the commissioning programme and grant-making and the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL).

The Committee was then invited to raise questions on the updates provided, which focused on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- In response to a question regarding the model of collaboration, it was noted that there were two key elements – the strategic group and the thematic groups that feed into the strategic group.
- It was noted that CVS Brent currently delivered Brent's infrastructure provision which included training, governance advice, governance support and assistance.
- Regarding the management of council contracts with VCS organisations, it was noted that there was a dedicated contract management team which monitored the performance of contracts. The team met regularly with those organisations to review performance.
- It was noted that each thematic group encouraged organisations working on similar issues or with similar client groups to share information, find areas of common ground and identify areas for joint action. This approach had proved particularly successful during the pandemic where partnership working was key to ensuring successful delivery. Whilst the model of collaboration was not focused on holding organisations to account, the thematic groups would be accountable to the Voluntary Sector Forum which met three times per year.

- In response to a question regarding how CVS Brent worked with small organisations, it was noted that it had an outreach model which sought to promote the services it provided and raise its profile with an aim to engaging with organisations across the borough. Once initial contact had been made with an organisation, they would be signposted to a thematic lead who would follow up with a series of conversations.
- It was noted that each thematic group provided the basis for more effective development of consortium arrangements, in ways more likely to be an attractive proposition to external funders and able to make stronger, joined-up bids for the funds they provide.
- Regarding applications for NCIL funding, it was noted all successful applications were listed on the Council's website. An application must meet a number of essential criteria before being funded. The latest NCIL round closed on 3 May 2021, focusing on recovery, the response to the pandemic and climate change. There were around 70 applications and the successful projects would be announced at the end of June.
- In response to a question regarding the accessibility of the NCIL application process, it was noted that CVS Brent worked with local organisations to support their applications. It was considering the ways in which it could upskill the VCS to allow them to apply for funding easily, such as training and advice and guidance.
- It was noted that the pandemic had given rise to more flexibility in how training was offered to VSC organisations. More training could now be offered online, and evening and weekend sessions would soon be offered.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the following areas for improvement be noted;
 - (i). To consider the Chairs of the thematic group being rotated on a regular basis.
 - (ii). The commissioner to consider widening the scope of CVS Brent service delivery to include evening delivery.
2. The Committee made the following information requests;
 - (i). To provide examples of the types of organisations using CVS Brent.
 - (ii). To provide a timescale for accountability and outcome measures for CVS Brent.
 - (iii). To provide details on how a new organisation would interact with CVS Brent.
 - (iv). To provide the number of Council contracts awarded to VSC over the last three years.
 - (v). To provide a view on how many community and voluntary organisations are at risk of closure following the pandemic.

8. **Knife Crime Scrutiny Review Update**

Councillor Knight, Lead Member for Community Safety and Engagement and Colin Wilderspin, Community Safety Manager, introduced a report on the actions relevant

partners had taken to ensure the issue of knife crime was addressed in the borough.

The Committee was then invited to raise questions on the updates provided, which focused on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- It was noted that the Metropolitan Police continued to work alongside partners to improve community relationships. Initiatives included training and advising officers on the implication of stop and search on members of the community and innovation hubs to try to improve policing relationships and trial new approaches to problem solving.
- Regarding engagement with schools to make their facilities available for youth-focused activities after school hours and during holidays, it was noted that such initiatives had been made difficult as schools had been closed for large parts of the pandemic. Initiatives had largely focused on crime prevention by targeting the most vulnerable young people at an early age and working with them for an extended period to establish long-term positive behaviours.
- In response to a question regarding the handling of housing needs cases for those at risk of violence through gangs/county lines, it was noted that current housing processes remained and exist across London. Individuals may approach councils due to fear of violence and each case would be assessed individually.
- Regarding front-line practitioners working to tackle knife crime in the borough, it was noted that most of the Council's services were commissioned to partner organisations. The Council itself employed a Violence and Vulnerability Coordinator, a Contextual Safeguarding Lead and a Gangs Mentor.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. To make the following information request:
 - (i). To provide information on the frontline staff involved in tackling knife crime – both commissioned and council-led.
2. To consider a further Knife Crime Scrutiny Review update in six months' time.

9. **Brent Poverty Commission Report and Recommendations**

Councillor Southwood, Lead Member for Housing and Welfare Reform introduced a report on the delivery of the Poverty Commission recommendations, as well as the actions raised by the Committee in December 2020. Councillor Southwood advised that key performance measures for the delivery plan would also form part of the Council's overall performance framework, which were currently being finalised for 2021/22, and quarterly corporate performance reports would be presented to the Committee.

The Committee was then invited to raise questions on the update provided, which focused on a number of key areas as highlighted below:

- Regarding central government's Breathing Space programme, it was noted that residents would be given legal protections from their creditors for 60 days, with most interest and penalty charges frozen and enforcement action halted. They would also receive professional debt advise to design a plan which helped to get their finances back on track. Members were assured that the Council would promote the programme through its usual communication routes.
- It was noted that Community Hubs would continue to support residents, with strengthening of relationships and referral pathways between food aid agencies and the Hubs. The Hubs had also been able to provide emergency financial support for residents in food and fuel hardship.
- In regard to period poverty, it was noted that the Council was working alongside other organisations to ensure women of all ages had access to suitable menstrual products.
- In response to a question regarding engagement with trade unions, it was noted that the Council was committed to engaging with unions as a key stakeholder. Members were assured that engagement was progressing and that conversations would be pursued on a political as well as organisational level.
- Regarding credit unions, it was noted that the Council had been working with two credit unions who could provide support to residents and staff respectively. More information would be shared with members as arrangements progressed.
- Members were assured that those residents who had been supported through the Everyone In homelessness programme had continued to receive support following the end of programme in July. The majority of those supported had now moved into long-term accommodation. Those with no recourse to public funds were being supported to apply for settled status.
- Regarding unemployment following the end of the furlough scheme, it was noted that the Council aimed to intervene early to support those residents affected. It would promote the Resident Support Fund and work with local employees to ensure they were taking on residents who had been let go. It was recognised that employment support would need to be geared towards older age groups as well as younger age groups.

It was RESOLVED:

1. That the following areas for improvement be noted;
 - (i). To provide targeted communications regarding period poverty work across the age ranges.
 - (ii). To work more closely with trade unions within the borough.
 - (iii). To publicise credit unions within the borough more widely.
2. To consider a further Brent Poverty Commission Report and Recommendations update in six months' time.

10. **Scrutiny Recommendations Tracker**

The Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker table, which tracks the progress of recommendations made by the Committee, was noted.

Members raised a query regarding the Modern Slavery statement. Officers would share the online link to the statement with members.

11. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker table, which tracks the progress of recommendations made by the Committee, was noted.

12. Dates of Future Meetings

The Committee noted the provisional schedule of dates for future meetings during the 2021/22 municipal year as follows:

- Tuesday 6 July 2021
- Tuesday 14 September 2021
- Wednesday 10 November 2021
- Tuesday 18 January 2022
- Wednesday 9 February 2022
- Wednesday 9 March 2022

13. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 8.40pm

R MASHARI
Chair