



MINUTES OF THE ONE COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE **Wednesday 10 July 2013 at 7.00 pm**

PRESENT: Councillor Ashraf (Chair), Councillor Colwill (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Chohan, Harrison, Lorber, Long, Mitchell Murray and Powney ,

Also present: Councillors Butt

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 29 May 2013

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2013 be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

3. Matters arising

None.

4. Brent Borough Plan 2013/14 and the Administration's Priorities

Christine Gilbert, Interim Chief Executive introduced the refresh of the Borough Plan. The document had been updated to reflect the changing environment and emerging challenges that the council and the borough was facing. The plan incorporated current policies and plans across the Council and consultation with partners across the borough on the shared objectives to achieve improved outcomes locally. The Plan had six strategic priorities underpinned by specific targets and outcomes to be delivered up to December 2014. The Borough Plan will define the more detailed Council corporate plan which will set out key service targets and directorate responsibility for delivery. Performance against the Corporate Plan would be monitored by Department Management Teams, the Corporate Management Team and reported on a regular basis to Members.

Members were informed that information on lead officers and responsibility for the action would be included in the detailed partner plans rather than the high level Borough Plan. Monitoring of the plan would be carried out through the delivery plans that support the Borough Plan such as the corporate plan, service plans and team work programmes. All employees should be able to see how their role contributes to achievement of the council's priorities and would be monitored through regular supervision and the council's performance appraisal arrangements. Members asked whether the impact of the welfare reform had been reflected in the Borough Plan priorities, as well as the proposed action of creating jobs at the retail park and whether this was a satisfactory aspiration of employment for the residents

of Brent. The Interim Chief Executive stressed the need for ambition in terms of employment. It was clarified that there was a detailed welfare reform plan in place which had monthly steering meetings chaired by the Interim Chief Executive. This level of detail was not appropriate for the Borough Plan but one of the six priorities focused on creating jobs and growth in the borough and incorporated the council's response to the impact of welfare reform. Members requested clarification on which definition of affordable housing was used in the Borough plan and it was agreed that clarification would be sought.

Members asked the basis on which the targets within the Borough Plan had been defined and there was particular concern about those from Environment and Neighbourhoods. The Interim Chief Executive informed the Committee that targets had been set on the basis of being challenging but also recognising the realities of the financial position of the council. This took into account comparative data where it was available and a number of targets that were considered to be unambitious had been revised upwards. Targets had been set taking into account the need not to create additional spending requirements. Christine Gilbert confirmed that there were funds available for staff training where additional needs were identified although these were more limited than previously, given the financial constraints. .

Members highlighted a number of local issues which they felt were particular priorities including affordable housing, local employment opportunities, fuel poverty and enforcement for fly-tipping and illegal food outlets. The Borough Plan included targets to improve performance across all these issues

The Leader of the Council acknowledged that these were key local issues but also highlighted that the capacity of the Council had to be taken into consideration when setting ambitious and realistic targets formulated in line with Council and partner resources. The Interim Chief Executive commented that targets would be closely monitored and were appropriately reviewed to ensure ambitious performance was sustained.

With regard to welfare reform, a seminar will be held after the summer to discuss the impact and the actions being taken by the Council and partners to support residents affected by the changes.

Cathy Tyson, Assistant Director Corporate Policy informed the Committee that there was no longer a standard set of national indicators or set methodology to benchmark against. There are voluntary arrangements in place between London boroughs to share performance data and Brent participates in this arrangement for bench marking performance.

Members requested clarification on the council's current responsibilities for school improvement. Christine Gilbert explained that though the council retained a number of statutory duties, and a legitimate focus on the needs and interests of children in the area, schools themselves held the prime responsibility for improvement and funding had been devolved for that purpose. Nevertheless, Ofsted had begun inspecting local authorities. The Interim Chief Executive stressed the importance of the work of the Education Commission which would really get underway in September. It would focus on the ways of accelerating improvement in Brent schools in the future. This would entail looking at the role of the local authority in this regard.

Following queries regarding the external funding to be provided to community groups it was clarified that £250,000 related only to community sports group and work would be carried out to enable them to access funding from companies such as Sport England. The Borough Plan also includes a target of a 4% increase in external funding accessed by voluntary and community groups in general.

The Committee were informed that a new initiative 'Weeks of Action' would be commencing later in July initially as a pilot with a view to rolling it out across the borough. The aim of the project is to make a demonstrable impact in one week by addressing local ward issues such as environmental conditions, to improve communication and focus enforcement and street cleaning actions. Consultation with the Police was underway to identify wards with the greatest need for action as well as wards which were greatest impacted by the welfare reforms. A programme for the remaining wards would be developed in consultation with the Police.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the Borough Plan be noted
- (ii) That clarification on the definition of affordable housing be provided
- (iii) A seminar be held in relation to Welfare Reform impact and actions.
- (iv) Clarification regarding targets and spending figures be sent to members - if over and above or in line with the previous borough plan
- (v) That the targets be regularly monitored and reviewed if necessary

5. Council Senior Management Recruitment

At the previous One Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee members requested further information regarding the Senior Management restructure particularly in terms of the political vision and the practical arrangements of the restructure. Christine Gilbert, Interim Chief Executive, informed the Committee that the political vision of the restructure was set out in the report of the General Purposes Committee and highlighted the need to have a slimmer, more strategic and focused senior management which would also save costs. The Interim Chief Executive continued to highlight the need to work in partnership and more directly with local people to address what was important to the residents of Brent. To enable this, the new posts would have a greater strategic role and allow the Council to work collaboratively by having a more outward facing role. It is intended that the Strategic Director posts should operate in a strategic framework that was flexible and robust with a greater role in community engagement to meet the changing needs of local government. Following queries, it was clarified that the Strategic Directors may not have specific expertise in all the areas they would be responsible for although it was stressed that operational directors would still have service specific knowledge and expertise. It was clarified that each role would be required to have greater communication and community engagement responsibilities and the new structure would enable this to take place.

Members requested information on the timeline for new appointments. Christine Gilbert informed the Committee that the Council would be making appointments where possible before the August recess. Posts had been advertised and interviews for some of the posts had taken place. She informed the Committee that in an effort to make appointments before the end of July, about 4 weeks had been

shaved off the recruitment consultants' usual timetable for appointing to such posts. She highlighted that the strategic director post with the responsibility of health, education and social care was proving difficult to recruit to. It was reported that there had been a large proportion of applications for the post of Assistant Chief Executive. The Interim Chief Executive informed the Committee that the Council aimed to have the majority of posts filled by the end of October following the completion of interviews and the successful applicants serving their notice.

Members asked if the difficulties of recruiting to the Strategic Director for Health, Education and Social Care could have been anticipated. The Chief Executive clarified that the post of Director of Children's Services (DCS) was universally difficult because of the level of risk involved. The specific post was therefore anticipated as being difficult to appoint but the addition of Health might attract existing DCS and therefore some flexibility on the appropriate salary level was required as had been agreed by GPS. It was confirmed that the restructure was currently on schedule with a cost neutral effect during the current year as a result of redundancy costs and the target of £2m savings likely to be achieved the following financial year. It was noted that there may be some transitional issues but through anticipation of risk and contingency planning, these would be minimised.

Councillor Powney requested further information on spend on consultants and agency staff and it was agreed that the Interim Chief Executive would provide clarity.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report be noted
- (ii) That information be provided in regarding the spend on consultants and agency staff

6. Update on the Working with Families Programme

Susan Gates, Head of Early Years and Support, gave an overview to the working with troubled families programme that was introduced in 2012 which changed the way families were worked with to break the cycle on intergenerational issues. 810 families had been identified for the three year programme with a dedicated officer coordinating the needs of a family, with an early help team established and trained. It was highlighted that Brent previously had limited early help available which had been a challenge.

Susan Gates informed the Committee of the multi agency hub that would be located at the civic centre acting as a central point for all services to RAG rate all referrals and identify the support required quickly. The multi agency hub went live on the 1 July 2013 although the Police cabling had difficulties function but had subsequently been resolved. It was explained that work with young children and adolescents was taking place to divert them away from the care system and save money on costly services in the future. The aligned services strategy enabled the team to meet the needs of the entire family through accessing a variety of services including the support of staff from other agencies and it was hoped a family nurse would soon join the team to work with young parents. It was explained that 303 families had been identified for the first year and the Council was now able to demonstrate that they were working with all 303 families and would be able to receive the funding

with 75 families being turned around and funding expected to be received in October following the submission of data. Susan Gates informed the committee that the programme had been extended for a further two years and would focus on public health.

During discussion it was clarified that the programme was funded by NHS England with compliments being received on the model adopted and the approach of the Council, although there were concerns regarding the capacity of the team. It was explained that there were some issues surrounding data sharing with schools but progress was being made and schools were keen to engage with the team as the programmes reputation grew. It was noted that many of the families were affected by the welfare changes and work was being undertaken with families to address long term unemployment where appropriate and to help them access benefits and education where necessary. It was explained that there was not a standard approach as each family had different needs. It was hoped that the scheme would become sustainable in the future and be funded by the savings made on not accessing social services further down the line.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the report

7. One Council Overview and Scrutiny work programme

The Chair informed the Committee that projects previously requested would be added to the work programme. During discussion it was requested that the integration of public health be added to the work programme. The Chair advised that this may be addressed through the Health Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee but if it was a One Council project the Committee felt strongly about it could be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

8. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the One Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled to take place on 9 October 2013.

9. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

J Ashraf
Chair

