Southwark Council

SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE B

MINUTES of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee B held on Monday February 8 2010 at 7.00 pm at Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT:	Councillor Richard Thomas (Chair)
	Councillor Jenny Jones
OFFICER SUPPORT:	Rachael Knight, Scrutiny Project Manager
	Mick Lucas, Public Realm Asset Manager
	Karen Harris, Scrutiny Project Manager

1.   APOLOGIES

1.1   Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tayo Situ (Vice Chair) and David Hubber.

2.   NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

2.1   There were no items of urgent business.

3.   DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1   There were none declared.

4.   MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the open section of the meeting held on 30 November 2009 be agreed as an accurate record.

5.   DECLUTTERING REVIEW - REPORT FROM HEAD OF PUBLIC REALM

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5.1   The chair introduced the new review of De-cluttering, reminding the sub-committee that the time available to undertake the review was very limited due to the imminent purdah and election period.

5.2   It was agreed that due to the short period of time available the scope of the review would be limited to a review of current council policy on De-Cluttering to ensure it is fit for purpose, and that this would be informed by an overview of council projects and programmes implemented.

5.3   The chair welcomed Mick Lucas, public realm asset manager, and invited him to make his presentation on de-cluttering to inform the review.

5.4   The public realm asset manager began by explaining the elements of street clutter and the rationale behind having the different elements of street furniture. Street clutter could include obstructive clutter, such as bollards, and visual clutter, such as a proliferation of street signs in one place.

5.5   He went on to explain that the main reasons for the existence of street clutter were:

- To create a physical barrier to stop movement
- Misinterpretation of regulations and codes of practice (they should not be there at all)
- A fragmented (silo) approach to schemes which affect the public realm i.e. cycle schemes devised and implemented in isolation from parking schemes
- Designing by computer without checking what is already on site
- Items installed by third parties which are not checked before installation

5.6   The sub-committee discussed the processes which happened now leading to the installation of street furniture, and the need for a balance between high quality, innovative and interesting design and planning, and the need for realistic maintenance costs and regard to the overall public realm in a scheme.

5.7   The sub-committee concluded that in order for effective management of street clutter to take place, it was necessary for public realm officers to be involved and consulted at the design and planning stage of projects so that those elements of a public plan which were to be adopted as part of the public realm were realistic.

5.8   It was agreed that a more holistic approach could also reduce the liabilities for the council in terms of the cost of maintenance of the public realm.

5.9   Members discussed the complex issues around the removal of street furniture, and the need to balance safety for residents with the

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aesthetics of the streetscape. In addition many factors changed over time, such as the balance of priority given to the car vs. pedestrians and the perceived need for safety in certain places.

5.10   The public realm asset manager explained that design standards also often required the installation of signs etc, but there was some flexibility in the legislative framework. The sub-committee discussed the need for an integrated approach to design of the public realm, looking at the legislative framework for example of parking enforcement at the same time as the minimum standards for a 20mph zone – which could minimise the overall level of street clutter.

5.11   The sub-committee discussed how a similar integrated approach could assist in the effectiveness of de-cluttering activities. For example if bollards were put into place to prevent pavement parking, it would be sensible to coordinate with parking enforcement to ensure that their removal did not create problems.

5.12   The sub-committee discussed the limited funding available for de-cluttering schemes. It was agreed that realistically, additional funding was unlikely to be available in the near future and this made it especially important to make best use of the funding that was available.

5.13   One scheme that was available for 2010-11 was funding through the Local Implementation Process (LIP), for pedestrian guard rail assessment and removal, including safety audits of the area. It was unclear at this stage how the sites for this scheme would be selected, and the sub-committee agreed that the selection process should include the need to engage councillors and members of the public.

5.14   The public realm asset manager explained that the public realm team were currently in the process of finalising a revised Streetscape Design Guide. This guide would be accompanied by a design review process and appropriate training.

5.15   The sub-committee discussed the scope of the Design Guide, and the timetable for its production. The sub-committee agreed that de-cluttering was an issue affecting the whole of the public realm and not just the streetscapes, and agreed that the Design Guide should reflect this. As a cross-cutting issue, it would be appropriate for the guide to be discussed and approved by the executive rather than through delegated powers to an individual councillor. It was agreed that the timetable for the production and agreement of the Design Guide would be provided to the sub-committee.

5.16   The sub-committee reviewed the pictorial evidence from a selection of recent road and street improvement schemes across the Borough. The schemes had various points of origin, some were traffic management schemes, whilst others were road safety initiatives.

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5.17   The sub-committee discussed the various examples of good and bad practice presented, and discussed how schemes could achieve better final results. It was agreed that many improvement and de-cluttering schemes would benefit from an holistic approach to ensure that all elements of the streetscape were designed and improved at the same time to avoid the piecemeal results that were sometimes evident in the borough, and that the introduction of peer review of the overall design would assist this. The sub-committee agreed that the peer review process should be formally embedded in the design process to ensure this holistic approach.

5.18   The engagement of councillors was also discussed. Whilst schemes already get presented and discussed at community councils, the information available to enable councillors to take an overview of public realm as a whole was limited. The sub-committee discussed the issues around this, in particular the fact that decluttering was often a part of many projects and not the single focus of attention, and that the availability of information e.g. interrogatable databases, does not always enable the easy digestion of better information. They discussed the fact that the result is that decluttering is often not addressed as an important issue, until the results of failure to address it effectively become apparent. It was agreed that the sub-committee would request that the executive consider whether it is appropriate to appoint a "decluttering Tsar" to provide a focus for this work within the authority.

RESOLVED

That a draft report be produced, in conjunction with the councillors present at the meeting, and circulated for consultation with the members of the sub-committee by 19 February 2010, to allow a clear two weeks consultation consideration before the next meeting of the sub-committee.

The meeting closed at 8pm.

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