

Scrutiny Sub-Committee B

Tuesday 9 March 2010

7.00 pm

Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

Membership

Councillor Richard Thomas (Chair)
Councillor Tayo Situ (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Columba Blango
Councillor Mark Glover
Councillor David Hubber
Councillor Jenny Jones
Councillor Andrew Pakes

Reserves

Councillor Anood Al-Samerai
Councillor Helen Jardine-Brown
Councillor Evrim Laws
Councillor Ian Wingfield

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Contact

Karen Harris on 0207 525 0324 or email: karen.harris@southwark.gov.uk

Members of the committee are summoned to attend this meeting

Annie Shepperd

Chief Executive

Date: 1 March 2010



Scrutiny Sub-Committee B

Tuesday March 9 2010
7.00 pm
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Order of Business

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PART A - OPEN BUSINESS

1. APOLOGIES

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

In special circumstances, an item of business may be added to an agenda within five clear working days of the meeting.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

Members to declare any personal interests and dispensation in respect of any item of business to be considered at this meeting.

4. MINUTES

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To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 8 February 2010.

5. DECLUTTERING REVIEW DRAFT REPORT

5 - 10

DISCUSSION OF ANY OTHER OPEN ITEMS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START OF THE MEETING.

PART B - CLOSED BUSINESS

DISCUSSION OF ANY OTHER CLOSED ITEMS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START OF THE MEETING AND ACCEPTED BY THE CHAIR AS URGENT.

Date: 1 March 2010



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

5.1 The chair introduced the new review of decluttering, 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 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.
- 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.

DECLUTTERING OUR PUBLIC REALM

Report of Scrutiny Sub-Committee B

FEBRUARY 2010

Southwark
Council

BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

The purpose of this review was:

- To consider Southwark Council's approach to decluttering the public realm of the Borough.
- To make a series of recommendations that can be practically implemented to reduce the street clutter in the Borough.

Street Clutter and its Causes

Street clutter can include obstructive clutter, such as bollards, and visual clutter, such as a proliferation of street signs in one place.

The main reasons for the existence of street furniture, which can become clutter are:

- Physical barriers to stop movement
- Regulations and codes of practice (requirements for certain signs to be in place)
- Schemes for specific users which affect the public realm e.g. cycle schemes; road signs; parking zone information
- Items installed by 3rd parties, such as post boxes and utility hubs
- Temporary items relating to repair or installation works

Clutter in the public realm is an issue in Southwark, as in many other Boroughs in the UK, both due to issues of safety for the community, and aesthetics of the places where people live. Street clutter is highly and constantly visible. The existence of unnecessary street clutter can be obstructive or visual.

Changes to the appearance and dynamics of the streetscape can be initiated, or inherited for example:

- as a part of a commercial development;
- as a result of new enforcement requirements;
- as a response to safety concerns;
- as a result of fragmented design;
- as a result of traffic management schemes;
- as an attempt to improve access ;
- as a result of utilities requirements.

Issues around the streetscape and public realm are usually considered as a part of a project rather than a programme or project in their own right. In other instances, street clutter is a result of a project, which may not have focused on impact on the streetscape at all, or as a very low priority.

Against this background a scrutiny exercise has been undertaken to focus on decluttering in its own right, looking at the Council's own policy and practices in this area, to understand better what happens now and improvements for the future.

The scrutiny process was informed by an overview of Council projects and programmes implemented.

Due to time restraints, it was not possible to consider evidence from a wide variety of interested people, nor from external organisations whose work has a direct impact on the design and appearance of the streetscape.

The focus has been on the Council's own work and procedures on decluttering and how work on decluttering can facilitate the highest possible quality of design and maintenance of the public realm in the future.

The Sub-Committee would like to thank Mick Lucas, Southwark Council Public Realm Asset Manager for his input which has helped to inform the review.

Public Realm Policy and Design

In deliberations the contributors to the review considered the need for a balance in public realm policy between high quality, innovative and interesting design and planning, and the need for realistic maintenance costs.

Southwark Council does not currently follow an overall policy in relation to street clutter. Individual elements of street furniture and signage are introduced as a result of a range of disparate projects, and this can lead to an incremental increase in clutter.

The Council is currently in the process of finalising a revised Streetscape Design Guide. This guide will be accompanied by a design review process and appropriate training.

The Review discussed the scope of the Design Guide and concluded that decluttering is an issue affecting the whole of the public realm not just the streetscapes. For that reason the Design Guide should inform policy and practice on housing estates, parks and privately owned space that is accessible to the public (for example developments like More London).

For effective management of street clutter to take place, an holistic approach to the appearance of any space is necessary. With such a large number of organisations involved in the planning, management, and maintenance of the public realm this is difficult to achieve. The merits of the use of a Design Guide in these circumstances are considerable.

There was concern that a previous Design Guide had been developed in 2006 but not adopted. A new version of the Guide is now being developed.

From a local authority perspective, a greater opportunity to pro-actively manage street clutter can be obtained, through the use of a collaborative approach. In order to improve the practical arrangements to make this happen, the review makes the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. The Design Guide for the public realm should be finalised and agreed as a cross-cutting guide for the Council as a matter of urgency. It should be used for the wider public realm, not only for specific streetscape issues. In particular, it should be adopted for housing land and reflected in planning policies so that new developments seek to minimise clutter.

2. There should be a substantial and ongoing training programme to train council staff and consultants in the use of the Design Guide to ensure that the good practice it advocates is embedded across the organisation.
3. The Design Guide should be championed at the highest level by both members and officers so that it is clear the importance that the Council attaches to the issue.
4. Ward Councillors should be empowered to become decision makers on highways schemes, perhaps through Community Councils so that those with an intimate knowledge of an area take political responsibility for decisions on such schemes.
5. To ensure informed decision making, training on streetscape design issues should be extended to councillors.
6. To aid in the profile and focus given to Street Clutter issues, and to reflect the cross-cutting nature of its use, the Design Guide should be agreed by the Council Executive, rather than delegated to an individual Member through the IDM process.

An Integrated Approach to Implementation

The Review heard evidence that although design standards often require the installation of signs and other furniture, there is some flexibility in the legislative framework. 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 can minimise the overall level of street clutter.

The Review considered various examples of good and bad practice presented to it, and discussed how schemes could achieve better final results. It was agreed that many improvement and decluttering schemes would benefit from an holistic approach. This would ensure that where possible, all elements of the streetscape are designed and improved at the same time to avoid the piecemeal results that are sometimes evident in the Borough. The introduction of peer review of the overall design would assist this.

The Review also discussed that local expertise should be used where available, and in particular, Living Streets have a specific expertise which could assist good practice.

A similar integrated approach could assist in the effectiveness of decluttering projects and activities. For example if bollards are put into place to prevent pavement parking, when they are removed it would be sensible to coordinate with parking enforcement to ensure that their removal does not create problems.

The Review discussed the complex issues around the removal of street furniture, and the need to balance safety for residents with the aesthetics of the streetscape. In addition many factors change over time, such as the balance of priority given to the car vs. pedestrian and the perceived need for safety in certain places, in particular around school premises.

There was discussion on the level of commitment to reducing street clutter across the council. Whilst those in the relevant part of the Highways team were up to speed on the issues, many of those responsible for installing new schemes did not show evidence of

an understanding of the need to reduce clutter. Anecdotal examples of new highways schemes in particular, pointed to a continued problem with the installation of street clutter.

Recommendations

7. Public realm officers should be involved and consulted at the design and planning stage of all projects to facilitate cross-referencing with other projects and ensure that the principles of minimum street clutter set out in the Design Guide are adhered to.
8. Living Streets should be consulted on public realm issues wherever practicable.
9. The peer review process for design improvements should be formally embedded in the design and approval process to ensure an holistic approach.
10. Early consultation should include the issue of maintenance costs. This will reduce unforeseen liabilities for the Council in terms of the cost of maintenance of the public realm.

Engagement on Decluttering Issues

The engagement of Councillors as advocates of decluttering in the context of developments and schemes across the Borough was also discussed. Whilst schemes get presented and discussed at Community Councils, the information available to enable Councillors to take an overview of public realm as a whole was considered limited. The review discussed the issues around this, in particular the fact that decluttering is 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.

The result of this is that decluttering is often not addressed as an important issue, until the results of failure to address it effectively become apparent, and complaints are made. Giving clear responsibility to focus on decluttering to an individual elected Member may provide a solution to this.

The Review highlighted the limited funding available for decluttering schemes per se. Additional funding is unlikely to be available in the near future and this makes it especially important to make best use of the funding that is available.

One scheme that is available for 2010-11 is funding through the Local Implementation Process (LIP), for pedestrian guard rail assessment and removal, including safety audits of the area. The engagement of Councillors and members of the public in the selection of these schemes was considered as one practical way to deliver a profile raising decluttering activity.

Recommendations

11. That the Executive consider whether it is appropriate to appoint a “decluttering Tsar” to provide a focus for this work within the Authority.

12. That the selection process for the forthcoming guard rail removal scheme should engage Councillors and members of the public who are likely to have views about priority areas.
13. The Community Councils should take a more central role in reviewing and approving highways and road safety schemes.

Conclusion

Decluttering of the public realm in Southwark is an issue which is impacted on by a wide variety of issues, priorities, regulations and Departments within the Council.

The Review saw pictorial evidence of good and bad practice in relation to street clutter, clutter removal and design collaboration across the Borough.

The recommendations in this report are designed to assist the Council to implement good practice in relation to decluttering.

The adoption of good practice in relation to decluttering could make significant improvements to the quality of the public realm in Southwark without having a dramatic impact on resources. In fact, in most cases, adoption of the good practice recommendations in this report would save resources.

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