



SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE B

MINUTES of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee B held on Wednesday September 2 2009 at 7.00 pm at Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Richard Thomas (Chair)
Councillor Tayo Situ
Councillor Columba Blango
Councillor David Hubber
Councillor Jenny Jones

OFFICER SUPPORT: Ben Reynolds, Sustain
Stuart Robinson-Marshall, Head of Director's Office,
Environment & Housing
Sally Masson, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 There were none.

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

2.1 There were none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 There were none.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the open section of the meeting held on July 1 2009 be approved as an accurate record.

5. SOUTHWARK FOOD STRATEGY

- 5.1 The sub-committee clarified the seven areas they wanted to see used as a framework for a Southwark food strategy:
- 5.2 Ensuring commercial vibrancy
Securing consumer engagement
Levering the power of procurement
Developing regional links
Delivering healthy schools
Reducing food related waste and litter
Using allotments and other Council land
- 5.3 It was felt that more engagement needed to take place with local supermarkets, to attempt to obtain their 'buy in' to a strategy.
- 5.4 Ben Reynolds from 'Sustain' which is part of the London Food Link, ran through a few things that Southwark may want to consider in their food strategy.
- 5.5 It was reported to the committee that around half of London boroughs had been considering a food strategy. Camden was considered to have a good model. They had formed alliances with relevant partners such as the PCT, RSPB and National Trust. They also used representatives from businesses and the local community who were consulted through a number of events.
- 5.6 Camden Council and Camden PCT had a very strong relationship which meant that there was good cross partnership working and ensured that the strategy was specific to Camden. Using a steering group, Camden had brought about consensus in the borough. Members were keen that Southwark followed suit, devising a strategy that was going to be specific to the boroughs needs.
- 5.7 It was also suggested that Southwark might identify a willing champion, who – paid or unpaid – would take an active interest in promoting the strategy. Councillor Jenny Jones thought that if Southwark were to select a champion it would be a post best served by a Councillor, rather than a community, business representative or Council officer. This could mitigate the possibility of the position being foisted onto someone who may feel their priorities lay elsewhere.
- 5.8 It was good to keep in mind that the partnership and the strategy were a means to an end and that it was important to identify the quick wins, to keep things interesting, as well as working towards the longer term aims.
- 5.9 It was emphasised that the Council itself should be leading the

way, setting an example to the rest of the community by ensuring that its own food practices were in sync with good practice. For example, catering for meetings should default to vegetarian selections which have less carbon emissions associated with production. The Council should not use 'red' list fish, (fish that is in danger of extinction) and provide good information about food and its production to businesses and the community to help individuals make an informed choice about what to buy and eat. This sort of activity was thought to be one of the cheaper exercises the Council could implement.

- 5.10 Providing free school meals would ensure that all children get at least one nutritious meal per day but it was acknowledged that this would be expensive.
- 5.11 Members wanted to know at what stage the tendering process was now at for the catering service proposed for the canteen at Tooley Street. Members wanted to know what ecological, environmental and ethical criteria were being considered to select the new service provider.
- 5.12 Cllr Tim McNally and senior officers are to be invited to committee to inform Members of the current tendering situation.
- 5.13 There was some debate as to which department the strategy should sit in. Suggestions included the Chief Executive's office, sustainability or an environment team.
- 5.14 Councillor Columba Blango asked how the committee intended to address the issues of diversity through the strategy. He said that African and Asian food tended to be imported with considerable costs both financially and environmentally. However, many countries depended on trading with the UK.
- 5.15 Councillor Jones stated that importing crops meant depriving those countries of water and that it was the multi national companies that were reaping large profits at the expense of local economies and the growers themselves.
- 5.16 Cllrs Blango and Situ to seek a community representative to inform the committee further.
- 5.17 Dr Ann Marie Connolly spoke about how the strategy needed to be embedded within the two organisations, both the Council and the PCT. It was important that a strategy was specific to Southwark. For example, Southwark has the highest population of child obesity than in any other part of the country. That 26% of children are obese by year 6, 14.3% by reception year and 95% of children overall. Overweight children can be more at risk of cancer, diabetes, heart disease and arthritic problems in later life. It is part of Southwark's LAA targets to reduce levels of obesity and the

PCT have devised an action plan and strategy - the Southwark Healthy Weight Strategy; this document covers four strands:

- 1 Early intervention and prevention
 - 2 Shifting the curve of overweight
 - 3 Targeting those at risk of an unhealthy weight
 - 4 Effective treatments of anorexia, obesity and other weight disorders.
- 5.18 In early years parents need help making the transition from breast feeding on to a healthy diet taking into consideration other determinants such as; play, environment and exercise. It is also important to consider how parents access and cook food and making parents aware of what is a normal weight and helping families to help each other. From studies recently it is believed that a quarter of 14 – 17 year olds miss breakfast altogether.
- 5.19 It was debated as to whether it would be a good idea to bring all schools meals under local government control. However, in Southwark, unlike other boroughs, there is no one single contractor and schools run the school meals service independently. It is therefore very hard to measure and monitor what is going on. The Director of Public Health made the point that if there were to be a centralised decision making body for the procurement of services, it would enable better consensus and affordable contracts which were better value for money. Southwark needed to get more of a picture of what is going on in its schools.
- 5.20 In Barking and Dagenham and Waltham Forest the food strategy had direct influence in planning where and where not to put fast food restaurants. They were not allowed to open within 400 meters of a school. The committee thought that this was a very constructive way forward however, it was recognised that although opening a restaurant could be prevented, it was not possible to close an open establishment down, making the reduction in restaurants slow progress.
- 5.21 Young people are encouraged to join breakfast clubs, although they are not available everywhere and there is a general concern that vending machines in schools should not be selling fizzy drinks. It is believed that children get through on average 3 – 4 fizzy drinks per day. These drinks are high in calories and have little nutritional benefit. Again, the products sold in the Council's buildings, such as Tooley St, should be reviewed.
- 5.22 It was thought that any progress with a food strategy should link up with the healthy weight strategy developed by the PCT and won a shared message to the community laying down better patterns and modelling good practice and willingness to change across the PCT and the Council. It is very important that the Council and leading agencies are at the forefront of change if change is expected in our

communities.

5.23 Members discussed that food in hospitals had to improve and currently there seem to be very unhealthy options especially in areas such as outpatients.

5.24 Dr. Ann Marie Connolly went through the departments where she thought the strategy might sit:

Environment
Planning and regeneration
Policy
Children's Services
Trading standards

5.25 It was agreed that Southwark would need to ensure buy-in from the voluntary sector and other groups. That there was a need to facilitate strong communication and what resources do we have to assist with that.

5.26 It was felt that there is a strong indication that there is a link between nutrition and attention and attainment

5.27 Councillor Blango made the point that for many children encouragement to do more exercise is not forthcoming. That the strategy might want to outline that there are foods which can aid exercise and performance.

5.28 It was frustrating that it seemed that often advice tends to change and that people tended to get confused over the constantly changing and sometimes conflicting advice given.

5.29 The Director of Public Health said that those people who tend to follow advice already tend to have a very healthy diet with a good mix and balance of nutrition. They also tend to be open to being kept informed of current/changing ways of thinking.

5.30 For those that are on a tight budget, things can be very tough. The culture of our society nowadays is full of marketing and product placements push forward the more unhealthy options. Often, foods with low nutritional value is cheaper, more filling and comforting, making those types of foods more desirable to young people and adults alike.

5.31 Ann Marie Connolly said that she would be happy to be the lead for the PCT for strategy development work.

5.32 Ben Reynolds from Sustain said that although food promotion of this kind tended to be the case in many areas, there were things that we could do to improve the situation. He suggested that Southwark might be able to influence small retailers to stock more

healthy options for instance.

- 5.33 Councillor Jenny Jones said that it was important to take into consideration the safety aspect of crop production. That crops were starting to fail and as a result food prices would be rising. It was therefore very important to start looking at local food production, protecting local areas and involving planning in relation to land use.
- 5.34 There were currently tracts of green spaces on housing estates and it was anecdotally reported that in other countries, land such as this had been used ostensibly for food production with some success.
- 5.35 Councillor Jones also reported to the committee that if everyone were to become vegan – we would meet our carbon emissions targets by 10% by 2010
- 5.36 It was reported that other boroughs within London were now looking at their empty spaces, within housing estates and council land, including local business' and community groups. Doctor's surgeries were also promoting schemes to involve the local community in food production and scoring systems have been devised which measure the sustainability of local food production with gardens cultivated on top of buildings scoring highly.
- 5.37 Members were clear that they wanted to inform the food strategy before any food policy took shape.

RESOLVED:

1 Cllr Tim McNally and officers are to be invited to committee to inform Members of the current tendering situation.

2 Cllrs Blango and Situ to seek a community representative to inform the committee further.

6. EXECUTIVE MEMBER QUESTIONS

- 6.1 The committee agreed to ask Councillor Kim Humphries questions around the following areas:

Social housing
Decent homes
Analysis of the new building service - home search
Common lettings policy

Leaseholder's charges
Management of open spaces on Council land
And an update on Lakanal House - depending on updates
elsewhere.

CHAIR:

DATED: