

UNISON Barnet: Future Shape of the Council Programme

September 2008

Briefing No 2

Public Service Principles and Values

Executive summary

This Briefing summarises a set of fundamental principles and collective and personal values which provide a framework for the way in which local government services are planned and provided. They should underpin the Future Shape of the Council programme. The language of public service reform may change but the principles and values should remain unchanged.

Recommendations

1. The Council should endorse and enshrine the following fundamental principles and values for the Future Shape of the Council programme.
2. The principles and values should be embedded in the development and appraisal of options. If a decision is made to proceed to procurement these principles should be included in the evaluation criteria and incorporated into all contracts and partnership agreements so that external service providers operate to the same standards.

Introduction

The London Borough of Barnet commenced the *Future Shape of the Council* project in May 2008 to review the organisation of the Council, challenges and changing demands on the capacity of the Council. The European Services Strategy Unit (ESSU) has been commissioned by Barnet UNISON to provide research and critical analysis for the Branch in the consultation process. This is the second of a number of Briefings which will be produced over the next few months.

The importance of public service principles and values

Public sector 'reform' and 'transformation' policies vary between governments. New phrases and words gain prominence whilst others become redundant. For example, terms such as competitive tendering, competition and best value have been marginalised or replaced by outsourcing, commissioning and contestability. Changes in the emphasis and priorities of local government are inevitable but this does not alter the basic purpose of local and central government. It follows that the principles and values of public service should remain unchanged.

In the last decade international bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), individual governments and public agencies have drawn up codes and guidance on public service principles and values. They describe a public service ethos and the standards expected of elected members and staff. Barnet's Sustainable Community Strategy contains core values such as protect,

enhance and grow, diversity, partnership, promoting independence and choice, engaging communities and customer focus. The Council's Corporate Priorities 2008/09 - 2011/12 also identifies values.

Given the scope of the Future Shape of the Council programme, it is essential that a set of principles and values underpins the development and appraisal of options, contracts, partnerships and shared services arrangements. However, the Project Initiation Document for the Transformation of Service Delivery Workstream contains preliminary evaluation criteria for options appraisal but they do not include public service principles. It is not sufficient to claim that these principles are 'taken for granted' because the experience of options appraisal and procurement demonstrates only too clearly how they are eroded with a negative and costly impact on services. This would be a high risk strategy and could result in:

- Reduction in the quality of services
- Loss of public service ethos in service delivery
- Increased complaints
- Erosion of terms and conditions
- Contractual disputes and potential failure of the contract
- Reduced savings

This Briefing sets out fundamental principles of public service which must govern how services are planned and provided. It also sets out the collective and personal values which should underpin the way in which services are delivered. The principles and values should apply to all public services irrespective of whether they are delivered at local, regional or national level.

Fundamental public service principles

- **Democratic accountability** (acceptance that accountability and scrutiny are core functions of the Council as a political institution serving collective and community needs).
- **Participation and involvement** (a commitment to user, civil society and employee/trade union involvement in the design, planning and policy making processes).
- **Openness and disclosure** (transparency in the policy making process and information disclosure whilst maintaining personal confidentiality and reasonable commercial confidentiality).
- **Social justice** (to eliminate victimisation and discrimination and to identify and mitigate adverse impacts of policies).
- **Public interest** (in the management of assets, physical and intellectual, and minimising risk).
- **Quality service** (maintain good standard and responsive services with effective use of resources).
- **Integrated and well-coordinated services** (to provide a holistic response to community needs and minimise duplication)

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- **Sustainability** (to conserve natural resources, maximise recycling and minimise waste in the sourcing of goods and services).
 - **Universal provision** (unless specifically targeted, public services should be available for all).
 - **Quality employment** (good terms and conditions, representation, training and development).

Collective and personal values for the delivery of public services

- **Honesty** (highest standards of probity and conduct).
- **Integrity** (commitment to the organisation's values and objectives).
- **Objectivity** (impartial judgement and assessment and clarity in communication).
- **Leadership** (high standards and financial responsibility).
- **Equality** (respecting cultural diversity and a commitment to justice and fairness).
- **Competence** (using skills and experience for the public good with a commitment to training and service improvement).
- **Selflessness** (motivated by service rather than by profit, commitment and degree of altruism and attraction to serve the public).



European Services Strategy Unit

(Continuing the work of the Centre for Public Services)

Director, Dexter Whitfield

Adjunct Associate Professor, Australian Institute for Social Research, University of Adelaide

Mobile: 0777 6370884

Email: dexter.whitfield@gmail.com

Web: www.european-services-strategy.org.uk