



Overview & Scrutiny Committee 8th December 2009

Report from the Director of Policy & Regeneration

For Action

Wards Affected:
ALL

Proposals to enhance local democracy – motion referred from Council

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 At the full Council meeting on 12th October 2009 members discussed a motion put forward by Councillor Ann John on proposals to enhance local democracy. Council carried the motion, with an amendment from Councillor Paul Lorber. One of the things that Council resolved to do was “to set up an all party/group scrutiny task group to investigate how local democracy can be improved, with a view to increasing the debate at Full Council meetings, improving the public’s access to local democracy and encouraging more young people to take part”.
- 1.2 The motion has been included on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda for members to decide how it wishes to respond to this issue.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider the full Council resolution and decide whether it wishes to set up a task group to investigate ways local democracy can be improved.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 At the full Council meeting on 12th October 2009 members discussed a motion put forward by Councillor Ann John on proposals to enhance local democracy. Council carried the motion, with an amendment from Councillor Paul Lorber.
- 3.2 Council resolved:

- This Council notes that membership of political parties and voter turnout in elections is at an all time low; the turnout in the last two general elections being the lowest since 1918.
- This Council agrees with Baroness Helena Kennedy, QC that the public perception is that 'political institutions and politicians are failing, untrustworthy and disconnected from the great mass of the British people'.
- This Council recognises that much of the public's reduced trust has come about as a result of things such as the MPs' scandal and their disgust at expenses issues such as the claiming of huge Second Home Allowances by MPs who already have homes in London. Nevertheless this Council recognises that this is a problem for local authorities as well as for central government and there are number of ways in which local authorities can enhance democratic renewal and take action both to involve local people more fully and to reduce the democratic deficit.
- This Council welcomes ideas from across the political spectrum to enhance local democracy. This Council notes that across the country many local authorities are reviewing the way in which local democracy is debated and the way in which local residents are engaged.
- To further enhance local democracy, this Council resolves to set up an all party/group scrutiny task group to investigate how local democracy can be improved, with a view to increasing the debate at Full Council meetings, improving the public's access to local democracy and encouraging more young people to take part.

3.3 This has been included on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda for members to consider whether they wish to set up a task group to investigate ways to improve local democracy in Brent. An extract from the minutes of the Council meeting on the 12th October are included as an appendix to this report. Although Council has resolved to set up a scrutiny task group, Overview and Scrutiny Committee is able to decide what it wishes to include on its work programme.

3.4 Members will probably recall that at their meeting in May 2009, a task group scope on the role of councillors in reinvigorating local democracy in Brent was considered, but rejected in favour of the task group on health services for people with learning disabilities. At the time there was little enthusiasm from the committee to carry out this work. This task group scope is included as an appendix to this report.

3.5 Overview and Scrutiny Committee should consider Council's resolution and decide how it wishes to proceed. One point worth noting is the timeframe for carrying out this work, if that's what members wish to do. It might be more appropriate to start this work after the local election in May 2009 rather than try and complete a review in the first few months of 2010. There is also limited capacity in the local democracy team to support this work until January/February 2010.

3.6 Overview and Scrutiny Committee should decide how it wants to take this matter forward. Full Council will be told what action the committee intends to take.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 None

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 None

6.0 Diversity Implications

6.1 None

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

7.1 None

Background Papers

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