

SUMMONS ITEM 7(c)

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL – 28th JULY 2003

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Scrutiny Committee met for the last time in 2002/03 on 30th April 2003. The Committee heard from the Director of Policy and Regeneration on proposals for developing the scrutiny function in Brent. These had come out of the work of the Constitutional Monitoring Group and had previously been discussed by myself and the Vice-Chair. Members asked questions around the detailed operation of the new structure and how it would be resourced. The Committee agreed the proposals with the addition that the Executive should be requested to provide reasons when it felt unable to accept recommendations from a scrutiny body.

The Committee received the final report of its task group on registered social landlords and housing management. The Chair of the task group, Councillor Harrod, presented the report and officers answered questions arising. The Lead Member for Housing was also present and congratulated the task group on the report it had produced. A couple of additional points were added to the extensive recommendations of the task group, which were then agreed for submission to the Executive.

Specific time had been made available within the Committee's work programme to receive a progress report on the first 6 months operation of Brent Housing Partnership. The Lead Member for Housing introduced the report and, alongwith the Managing Director of BHP, answered questions on different aspects of performance. Although the performance indicators were generally good there remained the problem of relatively low tenant satisfaction. This was an aspect BHP were working hard at to improve. It was recognised that the future monitoring of BHP would be picked up by the new Performance and Finance Select Committee, established under the new proposals for scrutiny.

The Executive's decision to consult on the future of a number of conservation areas in the borough had caused concern amongst a number of members and resulted in the item being called-in for scrutiny. The Committee considered the report that had been submitted to the Executive and questioned the Lead Member over the proposals. Whilst the Committee in the end accepted the decisions of the Executive, it asked that the results of the public consultation should first be reported back to scrutiny. The Executive did not accept this. The Scrutiny Committee also put forward an alternative proposal for use of the available funding to support the character of conservation areas and this was agreed by the Executive.

Councillor T Taylor
Chair, Scrutiny Committee

SUMMONS ITEM 7(c) CONT'D

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REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The first meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in 2003/04 took place on 18th June 2003. The Committee was brought up to date with the finally agreed arrangements for scrutiny and discussed how it was anticipated each element of the new structure would operate. Members recognise the need to develop their scrutiny skills through training and information sharing activities. Proposals for developing a work programme were also agreed and these are set out in the attached paper.

The Committee took the opportunity to consider the report submitted to the Executive on Brent's Community Plan. A number of detailed questions were asked after which the Committee was happy to support the plan. This is now before the Council for adoption.

Finally I am pleased to present to the Council the first annual report of the Scrutiny Committee. This is attached. Whilst it is generally agreed that the old scrutiny structure needed to be developed to make it more effective, it can be seen from the report that a lot of useful work was undertaken during 2002/03 with some notable successes. I hope this provides a platform from which the new structure can build upon.

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Councillor T Taylor
Chair, Scrutiny Committee

Extract from report to Scrutiny Committee on 18th June 2003

Developing a work programme.

1. There are three principle elements to the Scrutiny functions work programme:
 - Scrutiny of Executive decisions.
 - Regular performance monitoring information e.g Best Value reviews, BV PI's, audit reports, financial information.
 - Time limited task groups.
2. The first two elements will be covered by the activities of the Forward Plan Select Committee and the Performance and Finance Select Committee respectively. The third element will be driven by the three service based panels and the Management Board.
3. The scrutiny task group provides members with the opportunity to closely investigate issues of service delivery or performance and make practical recommendations to the Executive of ways to improve services. This is a valuable resource to the authority and the work programme should focus on the most pressing issues for the authority and residents.
4. In terms of defining the areas for consideration by task groups, subjects can be agreed by two routes:-
 1. A service area panel can agree to commission a task group on a subject relevant to their remit.
 2. The Management Board can request a service area panel or the Performance and Finance Select Committee to undertake a task group investigation.
5. Individual Scrutiny Members can make representations to the Management Board on subjects for a task group, which if accepted will be referred to the relevant scrutiny panel.
6. There are a number of sources for potential subjects for scrutiny task groups. These include:-
 - Members case work.
 - Complaints data.
 - Performance statistics.
 - Public consultation and Area Consultative Forums feed back.
7. However it is important when selecting issues for consideration by a task group that the remit is manageable and will lead to practical recommendations. Authorities who have derived most impact from their Scrutiny activities point to the selection of issues for investigation on a manageable scale. These have resulted in practical solutions for making improvements to the service. In this sense being over ambitious or too

wide can be counter productive, leading to a loss of focus and clarity on the desired outcomes.

8. The process for defining the Scrutiny work programme for 2003/04 will be lead by the Management Board. They will consider the outstanding issues from meetings of last years Scrutiny Committee as well as suggestions from Members. The three Service Area Panels will also identify their subjects for task groups, which they will notify the Management Board of, for purposes of co-ordination and prioritisation. There will be the opportunity to initiate scrutiny task groups during the course of the year as issues arise, subject to available resources to support the groups.