

SUMMONS ITEM

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

FULL COUNCIL – 26th January 2004

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Since 20th October 2003 when I last reported to Council on scrutiny activity, a number of meetings of the Select Committees and Panels have taken place and there have been some exciting developments in the scrutiny arena more generally.

As you are all aware, towards the end of last year, the Scrutiny Management Board endorsed the scrutiny Agenda Setting Protocol. The aim of this Protocol is to control and manage the number of requested items onto the scrutiny agenda and enable more effective management of the scrutiny work programmes. All Members would have received a copy of the Protocol and an accompanying letter from the Borough Solicitor.

I am pleased to report that two scrutiny and overview based training events have taken place since October. A West London Alliance Scrutiny and Overview Event was arranged by Brent officers and took place at the Town Hall on 1st December 2003. The event involved a number of speakers including Dr Jane Martin (Director, Centre for Public Scrutiny), David Natzler (Principal Clerk, Select Committees, House of Commons) and Janet Hughes (Senior Scrutiny Manager, GLA). The response from Members has been very positive. On 20th January, a visit to Camden took place and a small number of Members observed a Road Safety Panel in operation, which was both interesting and beneficial in terms of seeing how another authority operates. It is hoped that similar visits will be arranged in the future, including a trip to the House of Commons to observe a Parliamentary Select Committee in March 2004. Interest by any Councillor to partake in such activities should be fed back to Democratic Services.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to report that at its meeting on 8th December 2003, the Executive took account of and accepted the recommendations of the Roads/ Use of Road Space Task Group upon reviewing personalised parking places for orange/ blue badge holders. I now look forward to the Executive addressing the other recommendations of the Task Group concerning consultation of controlled parking zones and enforcement. The final report of the Task Group is scheduled to go to the Executive on 9th February 2004.

Quality of Life Scrutiny Panel met for the fourth time on 21st January 2004. In recent months a number of items have been requested onto the scrutiny agenda for consideration by the Panel and at the last meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board in December two such requests were referred to the Panel for consideration: Licensing Act and the Queens Park Conservation Area, which were considered by the Executive on 12th November 2003. Reports on these items were presented to the Panel and officers were present to respond to questioning. The Panel considered the draft HRA report, Street Lighting on Housing Estates and an update on Transportation

and Parking. It also received an update on the GLA Bid for the Olympic Games 2012, following earlier discussions on this matter in September 2003. As the work programme for this Panel is vast consideration is now being given to prioritising the issues that are looked at by Members.

The third meeting of the **Performance and Finance Select Committee** took place in November 2003 and in addition to the standing items on the agenda, the Select Committee received a presentation from the Assistant Director of Environment regarding the Onyx Contract. Members questioned the Lead Officer at length and sought clarification about a number of issues. At the meeting on 13th January 2004, the Select Committee considered Empty Homes as an area of financial risk within the Council and questioned officers following consideration of a report requisitioned by the Select Committee. Members also questioned officers regarding call centre performance and sickness absence levels and acknowledged a request from the Scrutiny Management Board to consider the Library, Museum and Archive Best value Review, which will be considered as part of its future work programme.

The **Scrutiny Management Board** has met regularly since my last report and Members have considered a number of issues arising from the operation of the new scrutiny structure. The relevant Chairs have provided updates on the work of the Social Care Scrutiny Panel and the Lifelong Learning Panel and it is hoped that future updates will encourage greater communication and awareness of the differing scrutiny work programmes. As previously mentioned, in line with the new guidance on Members requesting items onto the agendas, the Scrutiny Management Board considered a number of such requests at its last meeting and referred them onto the relevant panels and select committees.

The **Forward Plan Select Committee** has met three times since my last report and continues to monitor production of the Forward Plan and give consideration to future decisions to be taken by the Executive. Issues that have been considered at varying degrees include the Voluntary Sector Review, Kingsbury Pool Development, Neasden Town Centre and the Rent Review- Refectory and Central Middlesex Hospital. The arrangements in place for requesting briefing notes, information updates, full reports and attendance by Lead Officers and Lead Members continues to work well. At the meeting on 6th January 2004, the Select Committee considered three items that were called-in following the meeting of the Executive on 8th December 2003. The Select Committee considered Dollis Hill House and Stables Art Gallery, Conservation Areas Review and the Authority to Award Contract for the Supply of Standard and Kosher Meals and to Negotiate for the supply of Asian Vegetarian and Halal and Caribbean Frozen Meals report. As a result of these discussions, the Forward Plan Select Committee put forward a number of recommendations to the Executive, which reconsidered these matters at its meeting on 7th January 2004. Subsequently, the Executive noted the Select Committee's comments and recommendations for each called-in item. Regarding the Dollis Hill House item, the Executive agreed to defer its earlier decision and instead instructed the Director of Environment to identify potential rebuilding proposals for Dollis Hill House through funding support from the GLA. With regards to the Conservation Areas Review item and the Authority to Award Contract item, the Executive confirmed that its earlier decisions taken on the 8th December 2003 should still stand.

The **Social Care Scrutiny Panel** last met in November and considered a range of monitoring information relating to child protection issues and social services staff turnover. After consideration of the report on the Inter-Agency Inspection of Child Protection Services, the Panel made a number of requests for further information and requested that a presentation by the directors of the various Sure Start programmes take place at the next scheduled meeting on 11.02.04. Other items expected to be on the agenda include a report back on the Disability Awareness Day and the Council's/ LGA's response to the Children's Green paper.

The **Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel** last met in October and considered the Schools Budget 2004/2005, the Library Service Position Statement and the Draft School Organisation Plan. It was agreed that progress reports on the implications of Brent LEA's Post OFSTED Inspection Action Plan be presented at future meetings of the Panel and that OFSTED reports on Schools be presented on a quarterly basis. At the Scrutiny Management Board meeting on 10.12.03 it was agreed that the Voluntary Sector Support Review be referred to the Panel for on-going consideration. The next meeting will take place on 12.02.04 and the Panel will consider a number of issues including the Investigation into the Abscondment of Patrick Mullings from an Educational Visit by Hay Lane School, which was referred to it by the Scrutiny Management Board in December 2003.

Councillor Taylor
Chair, Scrutiny Committee