

**LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT**

**FULL COUNCIL –19<sup>th</sup> April 2004**

**REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Since my last report to Full Council on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2004, the different scrutiny Select Committees and Panels have met to consider a variety of issues and a number of recommendations have, as a consequence, been fed back to the Executive. In this report I will highlight the recent contributions by scrutiny to the decision making process, as well as providing details about the various work programmes that are underway. I will also be updating Members about other developments in the scrutiny arena over recent months.

The **Quality of Life Scrutiny Panel** met in January 2004 and considered amongst other items of business, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting. The Director of Housing and the Lead Member for Housing were both present at the meeting and responded to Members' questioning. Following a lively debate, the Panel put forward a number of recommendations to the meeting of the Executive on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2004. At the next meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2004, the Quality of Life Scrutiny Panel will consider a report on Supporting People and an update on the Transportation and Parking Enforcement Best Value Review, which will enable Members to review the Council's progress to date in implementing the points raised in the Best value Review Action Plan.

The **Social Care Scrutiny Panel** met on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2004, and a range of issues were considered including Hospital reimbursement Grant Proposals, Social Service's Improvement Plan and the Children's Green Paper – "Every Child Matters"- Brent Council's response. The Panel also received a presentation from the managers of the various Sure Start Programmes operating across the Borough, which provided Members with the opportunity to consider issues affecting young people in a local context. At the meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2004, Members established the "Joint Commissioning Strategy" Task Group and the work programme is expected to commence shortly.

The **Life Long Learning Scrutiny Panel** last met on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2004 and considered a large agenda, which included Attainment Levels, OFSTED Reports on Schools, Schools Causing Concern and the EAL Equality Action Plan. In addition, Panel Members looked at the Provision of Indemnities to Capital City Academy Trust against Liabilities connected with Willesden High School, following a request to have this item placed on the scrutiny agenda. The next meeting is scheduled to take place on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2004, at which Members will consider the Educational Standards Report.

The **Forward Plan Select Committee** has met routinely since January scrutinising the Forward Plan and requesting clarification and information updates on issues such

as IT Facilities for Members, Stonebridge School Accommodation, the award of the contract for provision of Asian and Caribbean frozen meals, the Voluntary Sector Grants Criteria, Willesden Sports Centre PFI, Capital Spend on Carriageway and Footways, the Wembley Masterplan and Items Selected by non-executive Members at Council-Decision Tracking. At the meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2004, Members considered the report on Transport Grant to Voluntary Organisations, which had been called in following the meeting of the Executive on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2004. The Assistant Director of Quality Support (Social Services) and the Lead Member for Health and Social Care were present at the meeting and responded to Members' questioning, which resulted in a number of recommendations being reported back to the Executive on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2004. At the last meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2004, a large number of items were considered by the Select Committee with briefing notes on issues such as the Youth and Community Centres Review, the E-Government Programme 2004/05, the Willesden Sports Centre Closure – Relocation strategy, the Draft Air Quality Action Plan and the Final Admissions Arrangements 2005/06.

The **Performance and Finance Select Committee** has met three times since my last report and has looked at a variety of issues from a performance and monitoring perspective. At a special meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2004, the Select Committee considered the 2004/05 Budget and Council Tax in advance of the meeting of Full Council on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2004. Select Committee Members sought clarity and information from the various senior officers and Lead Members that were present. Other issues that have been looked at by the Select Committee at its regular meetings include Waste Recycling – Recycling Action Plan, Onyx Update Report, the SEN Best Value Review and Performance Indicators, Vital Signs – Quarter 3 and Updates on performance within the Revenue and Benefits Service, which is a standing item on the Select Committee's agenda. Representatives from Capita and Onyx, as well as senior officers and Lead Members, attended the meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2004 and responded to questions from Select Committee Members. A recommendation arising from the lively discussions that took place regarding the update on Capita was subsequently fed back to the Executive on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2004.

Further to my report in January, I am pleased to announce that the Executive has considered the final report of the Roads/ Use of Road Space Task Group and that a number of the Task Group's recommendations were incorporated in the final decision that was taken by the Executive on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2004. The Task Group's report and the Executive's decision can both be accessed on the Intranet.

As I have already highlighted, a number of time limited investigations will shortly be underway. The Lifelong Learning Panel has established the "School Governors – Maximising their Potential" Task Group and meetings have now commenced. The Social Care Panel has already considered topics of interest and the "Joint Commissioning Strategy" Task Group is expected to commence its work programme in the near future. Task group activity by the Quality of Life Panel is also expected to commence in the near future with agreement about the establishment of a Task Group anticipated at the next Panel meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2004. The outcome of all investigations will of course be fed back to Full Council as part of future reports.

In more general terms I am pleased to be able to report back to you all about a number of interesting developments and activities that have taken place in the scrutiny arena since January. As many of you will be aware, on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2004, a trip to the

House of Commons to observe a Parliamentary Select Committee took place involving Members and officers from a number of authorities in the West London Alliance. Councillors Joseph, H B Patel, C J Patel, H Patel and I benefited greatly from the visit which included briefings with Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody (MP, Chair of the Transportation Select Committee) and David Natzler (Principal Clerk, House of Commons). I wrote a letter of thanks to Mrs Dunwoody and in response she has written back saying how much she enjoyed meeting Members from Brent and the other authorities and expressing the hope that the day was successful. Much like the trip to Camden in January, Members from all parties found this trip very interesting and I would urge all Members to take an interest in future trips that are likely to be arranged. Details about both of these visits were recently circulated to Members but anyone requiring further information should contact either Democratic Services or Adam Pokun (Mayors Office and Member Development Manager).

Other interesting developments include the development of an **Overview and Scrutiny website page**, which was recently launched on the intranet and will shortly be accessible on the internet by clicking into:- [www.brent.gov.uk/ Local Democracy](http://www.brent.gov.uk/Local%20Democracy).

As you are all aware, the inaugural edition of the **Overview and Scrutiny Newsletter – Spotlight on Scrutiny** was recently circulated to Members and provides an interesting update on all overview and scrutiny activity within the Council. I believe the newsletter will be circulated on a quarterly basis. The **Overview and Scrutiny Recommendation Tracking System** is now also up and running and will provide an effective means by which to monitor and track recommendations put forward to the Executive as part of the scrutiny process. This tracking system will be regularly updated by Democratic Services, with feedbacks to the appropriate Committees and/or Sub-Committees as and when appropriate.

Councillor Taylor  
Chair, Scrutiny Committee