

SUMMONS ITEM 9(c)

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

FULL COUNCIL – 28th June 2004

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

My last report to Full Council on 19th April 2004 outlined the range of scrutiny activity that had taken place between January and April 2004, including some of the issues that had been considered by the various scrutiny sub-committees. I also highlighted a number of scrutiny recommendations that had been fed back to the Executive and provided an update on task group activity in the run up to the conclusion of the municipal year. In this, the first report to Full Council in the 2004/05 municipal year, I will provide an update on scrutiny activity since April 2004, including on-going task group activity, broader developments in the scrutiny arena in Brent and some of the objectives for scrutiny in 2004/05.

Some of the scrutiny sub-committees have commenced their first meetings of the year with the Forward Plan Select Committee and the Performance and Finance Select Committee having met on 1st June 2004 and 23rd June 2004 respectively. Following the meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee on 1st June 2004, two recommendations were fed back to the Executive concerning Local Council Tax Discounts and the South Kilburn Masterplan, which will be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 12th July 2004. At its meeting, the Performance and Finance Select Committee considered a number of items including the Performance Agenda in Brent, the Improving Brent Action Plan 2004/06, the Best Value Performance Plan 2004/05 (draft), the Internal and External Audit Plans 2004/05 and the BVPI Satisfaction Survey 2004. The Select Committee's work programme for 2004/05 was also agreed at this meeting. The Quality of Life Panel will meet on 29th June 2004, at which time Members will consider the Panel's 2004/05 work programme, the warden scheme in Brent and proposed task group activity in the new municipal year. Thereafter, the Social Care Panel and the Lifelong Learning Panel will hold their initial meetings and agree the annual work programmes including proposed task groups activities. Consideration will also be given to wider scrutiny objectives in 2004/05.

The Scrutiny Committee is scheduled to meet on 1st July 2004, at which time Members will receive an update from each of the scrutiny sub-committee Chairs about panel activity in 2003/04 and the objectives for 2004/05. The Scrutiny Committee will consider each of the sub-committee work programmes and proposed task group activity for the year. Members will take the opportunity to debate any issues or concerns arising from scrutiny Members' experience last year. The Scrutiny Annual Report 2003/04 will also be presented to this meeting, following earlier consideration by the Scrutiny

Management Board and it is hoped that the issues raised in the report will prompt a lively discussion about the on-going development of scrutiny in Brent.

The Annual Scrutiny Report 2003/04 will highlight scrutiny's achievements last year in terms of influencing the decision making process, raising the profile of scrutiny in Brent and broader developments in the scrutiny arena. Whilst scrutiny as a process has certainly developed in the past year with strengthened Member and officer relationships, a range of recommendations that were fed back to the Executive and established working practices, there are still a number of areas for on-going improvement and development. Time limited task group investigations and increased Member involvement in the scrutiny process remain key areas that need to be addressed in 2004/05 if the full potential of effective scrutiny in Brent is to be realised. I would therefore encourage all Members of the Council to read this report once it becomes available.

Task group activity in 2003/04 was limited but a number of time-limited investigations are underway. The "School Governors - Maximising their Contribution" Task Group (Lifelong Learning Panel) has met at least three times and is due to conclude its investigations in July 2004, at which time the final report will be agreed. The "Joint Commissioning" Task Group (Social Care) held its first meeting on 17th June 2004 and is expected to conclude its investigations in November 2004. It is anticipated that a Quality of Life Scrutiny Panel Task Group will be established following the first meeting on 29th June 2004, following agreement by Members of a suitable topic. Future reports to Council will obviously update Members about these and any new investigations that are undertaken in 2004/05.

In 2004/05, the Member Development and Training Programme will again offer targeted training and skills based sessions for Members involved in the scrutiny process in Brent. Adam Pokun (Mayor's Office and Member Development Manager) will contact Members directly about any scrutiny related events that are organised over the course of the year but I am pleased to confirm that a session on questioning skills has been scheduled to take place on Monday, 5th July 2004. Councillor Erica Kemp (Liverpool City Council) will look at getting the best out of scrutiny panel meetings, particularly in terms of constructive questioning. Members will then consider working practices in other authorities and discuss ways in which to apply these techniques to their own scrutiny panels here in Brent.

For information, in 2004/05 the Scrutiny Management Board will meet on a quarterly basis to consider scrutiny activity by the sub-committees, any requested items onto the scrutiny agenda and any other issues that arise between meetings. Despite the reduced number of scheduled Management Board meetings in 2004/05, myself and the Vice-Chair of Scrutiny will ensure we are kept up to date about scrutiny activity in the Council.

Articles and clippings of interest have recently been circulated to Members of the various sub-committees providing further information on a variety of topics

relevant to the panels and select committees, and scrutiny practice in general. The second edition of the scrutiny newsletter, "Spotlight on Overview and Scrutiny" will be circulated towards the end of July to all Members and will provide an update on overview and scrutiny activity in Brent.

We enter 2004/05 on a stable structural footing, however, as highlighted above, it is important that we continue to develop scrutiny in Brent by continuing to address weaknesses and strengthening both Member and officer commitment to the process. I look forward to updating you in future reports over the course of 2004/05 about the on-going progress that is being made in the scrutiny arena in Brent.

Councillor Tom Taylor
Chair, Scrutiny Committee