

Summons Item 7 (c)

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

FULL COUNCIL – 25th October 2004

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members will be aware that a detailed report concerning scrutiny activity in Brent was presented to Full Council in September 2004. Whilst there is little further to update Members about at the current time, you may be interested to hear that there are currently three scrutiny task groups underway including the Empty Properties Strategy Task Group, which was formally established at the Quality of Life Scrutiny Panel meeting on 29th June 2004. Having agreed a membership and a scope, meetings of the Task Group are underway and the final report is anticipated in March 2005. The Joint Commissioning Strategy (Intermediate Care Provision) Task Group was established by the Social Care Panel earlier in the year and meetings are progressing. I believe the Task Group is continuing to gather information from the service providers and service users and the final report is anticipated in January 2005. Despite some earlier delays, the Onyx Task Group's investigations are on-going and an update is anticipated at the next meeting of the Performance and Finance Select Committee in November. It is important to note that these task groups are progressing alongside a number of Overview Task Groups including the Increasing Childcare Places in Brent Overview Task Group, Supporting Access to Financial Services for Excluded Groups Overview Task Group and the Sexual Health Overview Task Group. Clearly there are some interesting and important investigations underway.

With regards to other work that has either taken place or is anticipated in the near future, the Performance and Finance Select Committee met on 22nd September 2004 with representatives from Capita present to respond to Members' questioning about Council tax collection. Following a focussed discussion Members put forward a number of requests for further information and performance monitoring data to be presented at the January meeting to enable on-going monitoring of Capita's performance. The next meeting of the Select Committee will take place on 16th November 2004 at which time the Select Committee will receive a presentation on the Parking Account, the Annual Complaints Report and an update on the performance of the Benefits Service, amongst other items. As mentioned above, there will also be a progress update about the work of the Task Group.

The Forward Plan Select Committee met on 28th September 2004 and received briefing notes on issues such as the Draft Air Quality Action Plan, the Youth and Community Centres Review Update, the Pavilion at Neasden Recreation Ground and Wembley Stadium Event Day Parking Controls. Members asked for information on Paul Daisley Hall Charges Increases,

Brent Crime, Disorder and Misuse of Drugs Audit, Civic Centre Project and the Retendering of Leisure Management Contract – Draft Specification to be presented to the next meeting, which will take place on 26th October 2004. As always, the relevant Lead Members and officers have been requested to attend this meeting and respond to Members' questioning.

In response to requests from Members, it is proposed that a joint meeting of the Social Care Scrutiny Panel and the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel take place on 9th November 2004, to enable Members to consider the Children Bill. As all Members will be aware, the Children Bill will have far ranging implications for the Council and in particular for both Social Services and the Education Department. It is anticipated that a special meeting of the Social Care Panel will be scheduled to take place in December to allow Panel Members to consider those items that are already identified on the work programme. Items of business will include the Older People Services Inspection, an update on the Disability Issue Day and Strategy Day Report and the Social Services Star Rating.

As some of you are aware, Local Democracy Week takes place between 18th-22nd October 2004 and to mark the week a number of events have been organised by the Council. I'm pleased to report that a youth scrutiny panel involving two children each from Preston Manor High School, Queens Park Community School, Kingsbury High School and Alperton Community School took place on Monday, 11th October 2004. The Youth Scrutiny Panel "called-in" two reports (Gordon Brown Outdoor Education Centre and London's 2012 Olympic Bid- Letter of Support) selected from a longer list of reports put before them and Members of the Executive were invited into the meeting to respond to the Panel's questions. I believe the lines of questioning prompted an interesting discussion and resulted in Panel Members formulating additional questions. Responses from the relevant service areas and Lead Members will certainly be fed back to the pupils in due course. The event was a success and feedback from Members, officers and the young people involved has been very positive and it is anticipated that a similar events will be organised in the future. As you may recall, engagement of the public in the decision-making process, particularly scrutiny, was one of the objectives that was highlighted in last year's Annual Scrutiny report. Clearly this event highlights an important way in which we can raise the profile of scrutiny and engage people in all aspects of the decision making process here in Brent.

**Councillor Tom Taylor,
Chair, Scrutiny Committee**