

## **Summons Item 9(c)**

### **LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT**

#### **FULL COUNCIL – 31<sup>st</sup> January 2005**

##### **REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

This is my first report to Council in 2005 and I am pleased to be able to provide a brief update for Members about scrutiny activity in Brent including information on current task group activities and details about recent training events.

The Empty Properties Strategy Task Group was formally established at the Quality of Life Scrutiny Panel in June 2004. Three meetings have taken place to date and a further two meetings are anticipated between now and March 2005. A number of external speakers have worked with the Task Group and a range of case studies have been considered to provide Members with sufficient evidence and information on which to formulate recommendations. 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 the final report has now been produced. Information was gathered from a variety of service providers and service users and a number of recommendations were put forward in the report, which is expected to be endorsed by the Social Care Panel at its next meeting. At this meeting, Members will consider suitable topics for future task group activity, although this work is unlikely to commence immediately.

The Domestic Household and Bulky Waste Collection Task Group's (Onyx) investigations have now concluded and the final task group report was drafted in December 2004. This report contains a series of important recommendations and highlights a number of areas where improvements in waste collection could be addressed. At its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2005, Members of the Performance and Finance Select Committee endorsed this report and asked that an update on the Executive's response be provided at the next scheduled meeting in April 2005. Lead officers and the Lead Member will be requested to attend the meeting and respond to Members' questioning about what action has been taken in response to the recommendations. As always, it is important to note that these task groups are progressing alongside a number of Overview Task Groups that are still underway 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.

The Building Schools for the Future Task Group which was established by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel in October 2004 has not yet commenced its investigations but it is anticipated that work will begin in early February 2005.

Meetings of the scrutiny Panels and Select Committees have been on-going since my last report. The Forward Plan Select Committee has met regularly to consider a number of briefing notes and information updates on issues including Dollis Hill House, Youth and Community Centres, the Corporate Equality Policy and Action Plan, the Civic Centre Project, the Revised Park Strategy for Brent 2004/08, the Public Toilet Strategy and Children and Young People's Preventative Strategy. As always, the relevant Lead Members and officers were requested to attend these meetings and respond to Members' questioning. The next meeting is scheduled to take place on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2005 at which time Members will consider briefing notes on the Children Act – Establishment of a Children and Families Department in Brent (follow up report), Annual Workforce Monitoring Report, Approval of Enforcement Policy, Joint Municipal Waste Strategy, Disposal of Access Road leading to the Liberal Jewish Cemetery, Pound Lane and the Chalkhill Combined Facilities Building.

In response to a request from Members of the Social Care and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panels, a further joint meeting of the Panels will take place on Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> February 2005, to provide a further update for Members on implementation of the Children Act. The meeting of the Social Care Scrutiny Panel that was scheduled on this date has been postponed until 16<sup>th</sup> March 2005, at which time Members will consider outstanding items on the work programme including the Social Services Improvement Plan, Joint Commissioning (Intermediate Care) Task Group Final Report and an update on the Sure Start Programmes.

Two meetings of the Performance and Finance Select Committee have taken place and issues that have been considered include the Parking Account, the Annual Complaints Report, an update on the performance of the Benefits Service and Council Tax Collection, the 2004/05 Best Value Performance Plan and Audit, and the Annual Review of Corporate Governance and Action Plan Update. As mentioned above, the final report of the PFSC Task Group was endorsed at the last meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2005. The meeting scheduled to take place on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2005 has been cancelled due to a revision of the budget scrutiny process. Consequently, a joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees will take place on Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2005, enabling Committee Members to consider in detail the Executive's 2005/06 budget proposals. Lead Members will be invited to attend the meeting and respond to lines of questioning.

The Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel was scheduled to meet on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2005 but this meeting has been rearranged to take place on Thursday, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2005, due to clash with the school half term dates. It is anticipated that at this next meeting, Members will consider a range of items relating to SEN and Inclusion such as provision for under achieving groups and excluded

pupils. As mentioned above, the Panel's latest task group has been established but work is yet to commence.

I am pleased to announce that a special meeting of the Quality of Life Scrutiny Panel will be held on Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2005. This meeting has been arranged following a request from the Lead member for Environment and Planning that scrutiny investigate Neasden waste Depot, specifically issues about air quality and the enforcement of environmental standards. It is worth noting that the Management Board endorsed this request at its meeting in December 2004 and deferred the matter to the Quality of Life Panel as the Forward Plan Select Committee had received a number of updates in 2004 regarding the draft Air Quality Action Plan and concerns were expressed by Members about the lack on enforcement at the Neasden site. Consequently, this special scrutiny investigation is widely supported and will enable Panel Members to question representatives from the Environment Agency who we hope will attend the meeting. It is anticipated that suitable recommendations will be put forward to both the Environment Agency and the Executive for future action.

As you may be aware, a number of officers in the Policy and Regeneration Unit have recently departed from the Council and there are currently a number of vacancies for staff to support the work of Overview and Scrutiny. It is likely that the current vacancies will have some impact on the level of support for Overview and Scrutiny work in the short term but the recruitment process is underway and it is hoped that full support will be resumed in the near future.

A Member and officer visit to the GLA took place on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2005 involving myself, Councillors J Long, Kansagra, Lemmon, O'Sullivan, B M Patel, C J Patel, H B Patel and Sengupta. Following a pre-meeting with one of the GLA's Senior Scrutiny Managers who advised us about the scrutiny process at the GLA, Members observed a meeting of the Economic and Development Planning Committee, on which Councillor Blackman serves. The EDP Committee questioned a number of witnesses about the night time economy across London, focussing primarily on planning and design issues and the conflict between supporting the night time economy and encouraging more people to live in city and town centres. Evidence to the EDP Committee had been received from 33 organisations and of these four were chosen to attend the meeting as part of the Committee's time limited investigation. At the end of the evidence gathering session we were given the opportunity to pose questions to the Committee about their views on the night time economy, particularly in areas such as Wembley. Over lunch we were then fortunate to be able to meet with Members of the Committee and officers who responded to our questions about the operation of scrutiny at the GLA, commenting on good practice and drawing comparisons with local authority practices. This was a very interesting visit that enabled us as Overview and Scrutiny Members to observe practices elsewhere and to question Members and officers about their experiences. Any future Scrutiny related Member Development and Training events will be reported back to Members at future meetings.

On 8<sup>th</sup> December 2004, Councillor Thompson and I attended a meeting of the London Scrutiny Network at the ALG offices in Southwark. These joint Member and officer meetings are held quarterly and provide a valuable opportunity to share experiences about scrutiny practice in and around London. An exciting development is that the ALG has secured capacity funding to the sum of £95,000 to support a range of projects to promote and develop scrutiny across London. Coming out of this last Network meeting there are a number of ways that this money could be spent and I will keep Members updated about any specific projects that are undertaken in the future.

On 9<sup>th</sup> February 2005, Councillor Crane will be attending a Parliamentary seminar entitled Evidence Gathering.

Belated best wishes to you all for a happy 2005. I look forward to being able to report favourably in the coming months on the good work being done by Scrutiny.

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