

SUMMONS ITEM 9(c)

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

FULL COUNCIL – 24th April 2006

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

I would like to provide an update on Scrutiny activity within the Council, particularly as this is the last meeting of Full Council as we approach the forthcoming elections. It is important not only to reflect on Scrutiny's achievements throughout the municipal year but also during the past four years.

As previously reported, the final cycle of Scrutiny sub-committee meetings (except the Forward Plan Select Committee) took place between January and March 2006. As we are all aware, the Scrutiny structure was slightly amended in 2005 to reflect some structural changes that were made to the Council. However there was no significant impact on the role or function of Scrutiny as a result of these changes and the respective Scrutiny panels fulfilled their work programmes with the delegation of work to each Panel being, on the whole appropriate. However, the remit of the Quality of Life Panel was arguably too broad.

Below follows a brief update about how each of the Scrutiny sub-committees, aside from the Forward Plan Select Committee; have concluded their annual work programmes.

The **Quality of Life Scrutiny Panel** held its final meeting on 24th January 2006, at which time it considered an Update on Neasden Goods Yard and for which representatives from the Environment Agency attended. Panel Members also considered Updates on the Wembley Stadium development and the South Kilburn Masterplan, the Best Value Review of Regulatory Services, Parking Enforcement in CPZs and a petition concerning toilet provision in Neasden Town Centre. Members further considered the HRA budget/ rent setting and the final report from the Empty Properties Strategy Task Group. The Panel endorsed the task Group recommendations and the final report has since been considered by the Executive (April 2006).

The last meeting of the **Adult Social Care Scrutiny Panel** took place on 26th January 2006, at which time Members considered the Complaints Annual Report, Social Services Star Rating – Update Report, the final report of the Access to Sports and Leisure for Older People Task Group, and the Brent Adult Protection Multi-agency Report and Proposed New National Standards, as referred to it by the Executive on 14th November 2005. The Panel successfully completed its annual work programme and considered a number of important issues in addition

to the successful completion of a time limited investigation during the course of the 2005/06 municipal year.

On 2nd February 2006, the final meeting of the **Children and Families Scrutiny Panel** took place, at which time Members discussed a number of issues including the draft Children's Plan, the draft Extended Schools Strategy and the draft Building School Places and Accommodation Task Group report. A number of items were deferred from this meeting including an update on sixth form teaching provision and a report back on under achieving groups and Looked After Children (annual report & achievements) and it is therefore anticipated that these items will be rolled over to the 2006/07 annual work programme for future consideration, where necessary. The final report of the Building School Places and Accommodation Scrutiny Task Group was considered by the Executive at the April meeting, at which time Executive Members noted the Task Group's recommendations and praised the Task Group for the investigations.

The **Performance and Finance Select Committee** held its final meeting on 21st March 2006. Members concluded the 2005/06 work programme by considering a variety of issues including the Vital Signs (Quarter 3), the Performance Indicator (PI) Comparison report, a report on Third Party Insurance Claims, an update on Revenue and Benefits performance, a risk management update and the Joint Audit Plan. Members also received and endorsed the final report of the Performance Management Task Group, which conducted time limited investigations between September 2005 and February 2006.

The **Forward Plan Select Committee** has continued to meet on a regular basis to monitor the Forward Plan and carry out pre-scrutiny of items due to be considered by the Executive. Decisions were called-in after the Executive meeting on 16th January 2006 concerning the Wembley Regeneration and the Casino Advisory Panel and the Review of Cemetery Service and these items were considered by Members of the Select Committee on 30th January 2006 and 28th February 2006 respectively. The views of the Select Committee were fed back to the Executive and in the case of the Casino item the Executive noted the comments of the Select Committee but reaffirmed the decision that was taken on 16th January 2006. The Select Committee continues to review this matter. With regard to the Review of Cemetery Service, the Executive agreed to the Select Committee's recommendation that it undertake further consultation with residents on these issues. At its most recent meetings the Select Committee has considered a range of briefing notes on items including the re-tendering of the waste management contracts, Leaseholder Services Charges Capping Proposal to Leaseholders in South Kilburn, Joint Commissioning with tPCT, the Award of Leisure Management Contract for Vale Farm and Charteris Sports Centres; and Preston Park Primary School –Tender Results.

With regard to task group activity in 2005/06, it should be noted that a great deal of work has been undertaken and since May 2005, a number of reports have

been produced by a range of Overview and Scrutiny task groups. The Executive has received five final reports in the past year on issues including Sexual Health and Young People, Supporting Access to Financial Services for Excluded Groups and Increasing Childcare Places in Brent. Investigations have also been completed on Access to Sports and Leisure for Older People, Performance Management, the Empty Properties Strategy, School Places and Accommodation, and Community Access to Schools. It is anticipated that the final reports arising from these investigations will be considered by the Executive in due course. As always, Members of both Overview and Scrutiny look to the Executive to welcome these reports and pursue implementation of the recommendations wherever possible.

As you are all aware, a number of significant events, achievements and developments have taken place this year including the first London-wide **Budget Scrutiny Event** hosted by Brent in December 2005, various Member training and development opportunities and the **joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees** on 22nd February 2006, as reflected on at the last meeting of Full Council in March. I would again like to highlight the cross-party approach to this joint meeting and of consideration of the budget proposals, although I acknowledge the comments made by Councillor Thompson at the previous meeting of Full Council about the need to develop and strengthen this particular aspect of Scrutiny. In addition, the **Overview and Scrutiny Newsletter** ("Spotlight on Overview and Scrutiny") has been routinely produced throughout the year in an effort to raise awareness about Overview and Scrutiny's activities and a final edition for 2005/06 was circulated to all Members in March to provide a brief round up on the year's activities.

Clearly, as we approach the end of the life of this Council, it is obvious that 2006/07 will bring with it a number of changes, primarily the introduction of new councillors, some of whom may undertake responsibilities within the Scrutiny function. It is therefore a significant period in time as we reflect on the past four years following the Council's implementation and development of Scrutiny. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Members and officers for their contribution to the Scrutiny function over the past year and also to comment on the need to make on-going improvements to the Overview and Scrutiny functions in the future. It is widely accepted that effective Scrutiny requires a mix of talent, skills and experience and with the forthcoming elections we have the perfect opportunity to develop new talent, identify new approaches and initiatives to Scrutiny and make further improvements beyond those that have already been achieved in the past four years.

Finally I would like to make reference to the sad death of Councillor Tom Taylor last year and to remind Members about how he had championed Scrutiny within the Council. I hope that with his memory in mind we will together, as a Council, continue to make further strides in developing Scrutiny acknowledging that whilst

there is no one model that fits all, an effective Scrutiny function can bring significant benefits to decision making in Brent.

Councillor Kansagra (Chair, Scrutiny Committee)