

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

FULL COUNCIL – 23rd APRIL 2007

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

I am pleased to be able to report on the work of overview and scrutiny since my last report.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its last meeting received presentations on the IT Strategy 2006-2010, Closed Circuit Television and Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA). After a full discussion on each of the items Members were satisfied with the information they received. However, it was requested that the Head of IT reported back to a future meeting, to provide an update on the implementation of the IT Strategy. At the time of writing the Committee is due to consider the Community Care Annual report on Complaints, an update report from the Health Select Committee regarding the tPCT Turnaround Plan Task Group and an update from the Head of Consultation regarding Area and Service User Forums.

The Forward Plan Select Committee has received briefings on a number of items, including an update on the financial situation at the PCT. The decisions taken on *The Future of Customer Contact* and *The authority to invite tenders for the Meals Service Contract* were called-in and, at the request of the Select Committee, the Lead Member for Housing and Customer Services and the Lead Member for Adults, Health and Social Care, in addition to several relevant officers, attended to update and to answer questions members had on these items. The Select Committee held a full discussion and made a number of comments and suggestions, including a request for additional consultations on these items, which were referred back to the Executive. In the event, the Executive did not agree to the suggestions put forward by the Select Committee and, as a consequence, both these items have since been referred to this meeting of Full Council and are included in the Executive's report.

The decisions on two more reports were called-in for consideration at a subsequent meeting of the Select Committee. These were: *Future Provision of Reassurance and Town Centre Wardens' Services in Brent*, and *Carlyon Print and Royal London Society for the Blind (RLSB) Options*. At the request of the Select Committee, the Lead Member for Crime Prevention and Public Safety and the Lead Member for Adults, Health and Social Care, as well as a number of officers from relevant service areas, all attended the meeting to provide an update and to answer members' questions on these items. Some Members of the Select Committee were satisfied with the information it received and the Select Committee agreed that it had no comments to pass back to the Executive.

As the Council's 2007/08 budget has now been agreed, the work of the Budget Panel has concluded for the current municipal year. The Panel's report was considered by the Executive in February, with the final version presented to Full Council in March.

At the final meeting in February, it was generally agreed that the new budget scrutiny process was more open and accountable than previous arrangements. Members were pleased to note that some of their recommendations had been directly incorporated into the final budget. Furthermore, officers highlighted that through the questioning of individual service areas, the Panel had positively influenced the budget setting process. It is hoped that the Panel will build on this good start next year, and the first meeting will take place much earlier, in July, to ensure that the Panel is involved from the initial stages of budget formation.

The single biggest issue for the Health Select Committee over the past few months has been the ongoing financial problems of the Brent PCT. The Turnaround Plan Task Group established to investigate this issue has now concluded its inquiry, and its recommendations have been agreed by the Executive. These included possible options for holding a public hearing, and commissioning an independent organisation to carry out a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) on the Plan. There are also plans to set up a future task group to monitor the issue of NHS finances locally.

During this period, the LINKs Task Group also concluded its work on government proposals to reform Patient and Public Involvement Forums (PPIF). It was agreed that the Health Select Committee would return to this issue once the relevant legislation on LINKs has been implemented.

The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee has continued to develop a work programme reflecting interests in Looked after Children and services such as Extended Schools and Children's Centres. Youth service provision has also been a recurrent theme with two petitions on this issue being presented to the Committee. The Committee has heard concerns expressed regarding the effect of PCT cuts on Children and Families services and in view of this the Chair has undertaken to write to the PCT to outline some of the issues highlighted. In addition to this a report was requested about the effect of the cuts which is due to be considered at the Committee's next meeting. The task group on improving outcomes for African Caribbean and Black African pupils has identified its key outcomes and has met with youth groups and other forums with a view to developing some recommendations. It is hoped that the task group will be able to produce a final report by the first meeting of the next municipal year.

The Performance and Finance Select Committee noted at an earlier meeting that the Council was likely to retain its overall Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) 3 star rating in the 2006 refresh assessment. The Select Committee expressed concern that the Culture Block rating was in danger of slipping in future, primarily due to changes in the way the CPA would be assessed in 2007, and this was likely to impact on reducing the overall CPA score for the 2007 refresh assessment. At a subsequent meeting, the Select Committee received confirmation that the Council had retained its CPA 3 star rating in the 2006 refresh assessment. The Select Committee has noted the

actions taken by the Council to address the recommendations of the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) in respect of two reports received from the LGO in respect of complaints made against the Revenue and Benefits Service.

**Councillor Dorman Long,
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee**