

**LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT****FULL COUNCIL – 21<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 2007****REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

I was pleased to attend my first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as its chair. The Committee met on 11<sup>th</sup> December and considered two important issues affecting the Council. Firstly, it received a presentation on the customer contact transformation project. Concerning some of the detail of the project, there was concern regarding the upgrading of the automated call distribution system and the committee sought and received an assurance that this would not prevent anybody getting through to speak to a member of staff if they wanted to. Concern was also expressed at the overrun on the costs of the works to the Kingsbury One Stop Shop and that this would not be repeated on other elements of the project. On a more general note, the Committee was concerned that the service was moving away from a face to face service which it was felt would be to the detriment of those people who were less able to present their case over the internet or by telephone and needed to see somebody promptly to get advice or help. The Committee felt the pace of change was too fast and that it was being led by the need to make savings rather than to improve the service. Because of the Committee's concerns a further report was requested in 6 months, with the Lead Member in attendance, by which time the initial impact of the new arrangements could be assessed.

The Committee also received a presentation on the proposed Older People's Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Members of the Committee were critical of the fact that the strategy did not contain any targets against which its success could be measured or identify any specific funding sources. It was presented as an aspirational statement on encouraging a healthy lifestyle for the over 50s but did not sufficiently identify the specific needs of older people and how these would be met. The Committee asked that the Director of Housing and Community Care be informed of its views on the strategy before it was put before the Executive.

The *Increasing Participation in Sport through Sports Clubs* and the *Town Centre Regeneration* task groups presented updates on their work. It was agreed to establish another task group to consider the Post Office's proposals for closures of Post Offices in the borough and to request the attendance of Post Office managers for questioning on proposals. The Committee also agreed the following priority order of additional task groups to be established as resources permit:

- Transition services for socially excluded 18-25 year olds
- Local bus routes to hospitals in Brent
- Community use of Council owned buildings
- Procurement and the equality duties

Finally, the Committee wishes to see the status of the work undertaken by task groups enhanced and will be tracking the implementation of the recommendations passed on from this work to ensure they are adequately addressed and where agreed implemented. More regular attendance of Lead Members will be requested. The method and timing for task group working will also be considered to encourage wider member involvement.

There have been two Health Select meetings since the last report to Full Council, both of which have included feedback on the ongoing work of the NHS Finances Panel. At the October meeting, members were informed about progress towards establishing a Local Involvement Network (LINKs) in Brent by April 2008, and Councillor Castle was nominated to serve on the stakeholder group set up as part of this process. More recently, the December meeting focused primarily on the issue of dentistry in Brent.

The Committee have now finalised their response to the consultation on the future of the Brent Birth Centre. Whilst generally supportive of the proposal to move the centre to Northwick Park Hospital and relocate antenatal care to the main building of the Central Middlesex Hospital, access and transport have been raised as potential areas of concern. It is anticipated that due to their far reaching implications, the proposals arising from Professor Sir Ara Darzi's *'Health Care for London'* report will be the main focus of the Health Select Committee's work over the coming months. With this in mind, the Chair has kept members up to date on progress made by the newly established London-wide Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee; the terms of reference of this committee are attached for members' information.

The Budget Panel have now been provided with updates from each service area regarding their individual budgets and pressures for the coming year. At the November meeting, the Leader of the Council responded to questioning on the Budget First Reading Debate. Briefings have also been provided on matters ranging from the Council's Parking Control Account to the Local Area Agreement. Work is well underway in producing the Panel's 2<sup>nd</sup> Interim Report, which will be considered at the meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> February. In order to ensure the widest possible participation in the budget scrutiny process, all members are encouraged to attend this meeting, where there will be an opportunity to raise questions on the draft budget prior to its consideration by the Executive.

Three meetings of the Forward Plan Select Committee have taken place since the previous update. At the 24<sup>th</sup> October meeting, members expressed concern that the proposed Controlled Drinking Zone scheme was under resourced and they felt that the scheme had not been given sufficient consideration. Review of Governance Arrangements in respect of the South Kilburn New Deals for Communities (SKNDC) was also considered and the Select Committee advised that the Executive recommend to the SKNDC Board that it establish a standing Audit Committee.

At the 28<sup>th</sup> November meeting, members requested a number of updates including Waste Policy and Compulsory Recycling, Day Services Modernisation Learning Disabilities and Melrose Re-Provision of Residential and Respite Care Authority to Tender.

At the last meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> December, the Forward Plan Select Committee requested that the Executive consider implementing compulsory recycling by introducing the 1<sup>st</sup> phase for 3 months, followed by a 1 month's consultation to consider if any changes were required prior to implementing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase. Members were advised that the future of day centres was under consideration as result of Government policy emphasis in providing more personal care plans for providers. Members also noted that Melrose was the site chosen to re-provide for the service currently provided at Tudor Gardens. Items to be considered at future meetings of the Select Committee would include Clock Cottage in Kenton Road, a Business Case for a New Civic Centre and Wembley Security Arrangements.

The Performance and Finance Select Committee met on 28<sup>th</sup> November to consider the performance of the new waste contract that commenced in April 2007. Members noted the overall improvement in street cleanliness but expressed concern that there was still some inconsistency across the borough. Another update on this issue will be provided at the next meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, where there will be opportunity for members to question representatives of the waste management contractor, Veolia. At the November meeting, the Select Committee considered the Waste Policy and Compulsory Recycling, where concern was expressed about the lack of recycling facilities available on estates and information sought on the steps taken to address this. Members discussed whether there should be a trial scheme in a specific area prior to compulsory recycling being introduced to the whole Borough. The Select Committee stressed the importance of effective communication in educating residents of the need to recycle and how they can be involved in the process. Members also requested that details on migration movement to Brent and its impact upon Council Services and consideration of changes made to social care charges be considered at a future meeting.

In December, there was a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee during which recurring issues of importance such as youth service mapping and the demand for primary and secondary school places in the borough were discussed. With regard to the latter, members noted the importance of the Committee maintaining a watching brief over this issue. The Committee also heard about 'Languages in Schools' and during their discussion of this, members welcomed the views from the representative of the help Somalia Foundation who had been invited to the meeting as a witness. Consequently, the Committee has requested a verbal update for the following meeting on the issues raised by Somali parents with regard to supporting their children's achievements. Additionally, the Committee discussed its tracking mechanisms and agreed methods for ensuring that outcomes from the Committee were monitored and followed up. In relation to this it was noted that the Task Group on Healthy Relationships would be arranging its first meeting for sometime in January 2008.

In conclusion, I wish to thank Councillor Castle taking responsibility for the work of the Committee during Councillor D. Long's illness.