

**LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT**

**FULL COUNCIL – 30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2008**

**REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Since my last report, there has been much activity in Overview and Scrutiny. As a result of the interest in the potential post office closures in Brent, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided to establish a task group to investigate this issue. In March the task group's final report was presented to the Committee and representatives from the Post Office Ltd and Postwatch attended the meeting to discuss the report. Despite the task group's recommendations to keep two specific branches open, the Committee recently heard that the Post Office Ltd will be going ahead with the 6 planned closures.

The final report of the town centre regeneration task group was put before the Committee in March and Members endorsed the recommendations and have asked for them to be put before the Executive.

At the meeting in May, the Committee received updates on the town centre regeneration task group and the voluntary sector task group. The Committee noted that the task group's recommendations had nearly all been implemented and asked for a final update to be put before the Committee early in 2009.

In January, the Performance and Finance Select Committee discussed the Staff Survey 2006/07 action plan and asked for further updates on this in the future. The Committee also had the opportunity to review a comparison of Brent's performance during 2006/07 at their meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2008. This raised many issues and areas for improvement were highlighted.

At their most recent meeting the Committee received a report on "Populations Estimates". Members discussed a study prepared by Professor Les Mayhew and were asked to consider the financial implications of Brent's changing population dynamics. Members were interested to note the view that the Office of National Statistics (ONS) had underestimated the population growth in Brent. It was commented that there was likely to be a strain on resources should the population be increasing more rapidly than forecast.

The Performance and Finance Select Committee has also continued to review the Council's Waste Service. At their meeting in January Members discussed the performance of Veolia, the current contractor, with regard to waste collection, street cleaning and recycling. In addition to this the Committee was able to review the Audit Commission's Inspection of Waste Management Service at their most recent meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> June.

The Budget Panel met twice in February, to scrutinise the 2008/09 Budget. The meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2008, was arranged to ensure the widest possible participation in the budget scrutiny process and areas of particular interest included the allocated provision for priority growth, the new Neighbourhood Working Scheme and the overspend within the Adult Social Care budget. Regarding the latter, such was member's concern that a recommendation in the Second Budget Panel Interim report was to have the Adult Social Care Budget closely monitored in the future.

In response to a request, the Review of Fees and Charges for 2008/09 was put before the Budget Panel members at their meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> February. During discussion, members expressed a particular interest in the possibility of increasing revenue through adapting staff car parking arrangements. In view of this the Budget Panel put forward a request for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider establishing a task group to explore this issue further. It is worth noting that the Panel has completed its second year of operation and that the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources has commented on how the Panel's knowledge base had increased significantly enabling it to perform a rigorous and wide ranging scrutiny function.

Five meetings of the Forward Plan Select Committee have taken place since my last report. At the meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2008, the Committee considered six reports that were called in from the meeting of the Executive in January as follows:

- Customer Contact Transformation Programme Progress Report
- Temporary Accommodation Update
- Authority to Tender Contract for the Provision of Residential and Respite Care
- Housing and Social Care Non HRA PFI Project – Funding of Advanced Works
- Library Strategy 2008 - 2012
- Public Right of Way Improvement Plan

The Committee discussed the decisions of the Executive and with regard to the Public Right of Way Improvement Plan requested that the Executive should instruct the Transportation Unit to liaise with Area Consultative Forums and other relevant bodies in order to facilitate knowledge of the report and the consultative process.

A briefing note on the business case for a new Civic Centre was also presented to the Forward Plan Select Committee at the meeting in February. Members discussed this in great detail and requested more information on the Council's policies with regard to accommodating staff in a new building, flexible working, contingency planning and eco-friendliness.

At the meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2008 the Committee considered decisions that had been called in from the meeting of the Executive on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2008. These related to the reports on South Kilburn New Deals for Communities Delivery Plan 2008 – 2010 and the Authority to Award Contract for a Cook on Route Meals Service. The latter item was the subject of much debate and the Committee requested the Executive to agree for the Council to retain the current service whilst the company was independently quality checked.

Several briefing notes were considered at the meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2008, these included information on the Homelessness Review 2008: Strategy and Action Plan 2008 - 2013, the Domestic Vehicle Crossing Policy and the Barham Park Estate Redevelopment Options.

There was much interest in the report on Barham Park and it was recommended that the Executive should look at having a contingency plan in place in case a redevelopment option could not be undertaken.

The Health Select Committee has met twice since my last report. At both meetings there were updates on Brent's teaching Primary Care Trust (tPCT), Public and Patient involvement Forum (PPIF) and on establishing a Local Involvement Network (LINK). At the meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2008 the Committee heard about the "Healthcare for London: a Framework for Action" report and the process for consultation on Brent tPCT. Whilst discussing this Members acknowledged that introducing polyclinics was a controversial element of the report. When updated on this issue at the following meeting, the Chief Executive of Brent tPCT confirmed that that he had received a letter from National Health Service (NHS) London asking for suggested sites for polyclinics.

Other reports considered at Health Select Committee's meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> April included the Healthcare Commission's Annual Health Check. Also before the Committee was the Taylor report, an independent review commissioned by NHS London to investigate management and governance failures within Brent tPCT. There was much discussion on this however, the Committee was glad to receive assurances from the tPCT Chief Executive that the organisation was now officially out of turnaround.

The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee has met three times since my last report in January. One of the items considered at the meeting in February was the 14 - 19 report that discussed the Council's 14-19 partnership that was developed to fulfil the Council's strategic duty to promote choice, diversity, high standards and the fulfilment of potential for every child. Having discussed this, the Committee agreed that they should also have the opportunity to look at the results of the audit of school facilities and this report was discussed at the last meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2008. At this meeting Committee members agreed that they would like to receive further updates in order to monitor progress on the delivery of 14-19 Diplomas.

The Committee also had the opportunity to scrutinise the 'Schools Budget and Review of School Funding Formula 2008/09 to 2010/11' at their meeting in February and concerns were raised about proposed changes to early years education funding in 2010/2011. At the meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2008 the Committee received an update report on 'Improving Outcomes for Black African and Black Caribbean Children and young people.' This was in follow up to work initiated by a task group of the Committee in the previous year. The Committee was pleased to note the areas in which improvements had been made and their discussion informed what would be the key areas for priority action in the next 12 months.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee along with several of the sub-committees have been reviewing their work programme for 2008/2009. As Members consider the issues for scrutiny in the new municipal year, I would like to remind them of the 'Overview and Scrutiny Seminar' which is part of the Member Development Programme and will be taking place on **21<sup>st</sup> July 2008 at 7.15pm**. I would like to encourage members to attend this event that promises to be enlightening and should further equip members to successfully carry out the Overview and Scrutiny function in Brent.