

**LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT****Full Council – 27<sup>th</sup> October 2008****Report from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

At the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that has taken place since my last report to Council, representatives of the Metropolitan Police, Brent Association for Voluntary Action (BrAVA) and NHS Brent were present. The Lead Member for Adults, Health and Social Care, Councillor Colwill was also present. The committee considered the 2007/08 annual report of the safeguarding adults committee and the outcome of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) on Independence, Well Being and Choice. The committee scrutinised the 3 year strategic action plan and the action plan produced in response to the CSCI report. Questions were asked on the multi-agency protocol on domestic violence referrals. I asked that a member briefing be organised on abuse of vulnerable adults. The committee also requested a briefing on the protocol. A request was made for more meaningful statistics to be used in future reports. The committee will again consider the action plans in the spring of next year.

The committee was updated on progress on the consultation on modernising learning disabilities day services. The Council has admitted that the way previous consultation was carried out had led to a lack of confidence in the process and as a result it was now trying to be clearer about the proposals in the next phase of consultation. A further update will be presented in the spring of next year. In the meantime members of the committee asked that a day visit to Strathcona Learning Disability Day Centre be organised and that the possibility of inviting a carers' representative to meet with the Committee be explored.

In considering a report on direct payments and self directed support, the committee has asked that a copy of a DVD showing direct payments users, promotional material and training be sent to each group office so that any councillor can borrow it to view and for the DVD to be shown on the visit to Strathcona referred to above.

Current task groups include public transport access to health sites which is scheduled to report in December, increasing participation of flats in recycling which is currently considering examples of good practice, and climate change which is due to report early in 2009.

The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee was updated on the sufficiency of school places, the number of children without a school place and measures being taken to provide suitable provision out of school. The position was noted and further consideration of aspects of this issue will take place at the next meeting of the committee. The committee received a report on the provision of sports facilities and opportunities for

young people in Brent. The report recognised that the Council was just one of many providers, and included information about sports provision within and outside schools. It also pointed out the significant improvement of school sport in Brent. Members asked that a further report, focusing on the provision of swimming in the borough, be considered at a future meeting and that the revised sports strategy be discussed at a future meeting. The committee noted a report on the recruitment and retention of high-quality teaching staff and the improved success rates in relation to recruiting head teachers, with only one post being readvertised.

The committee also noted a report on the progress of the *Invest to Save* programme and Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets relating to the education of Looked After Children. The committee will be receiving the final report of the task group on involving parents and faith groups in talking to young people about sex and relationships at its next meeting.

At the meeting of the Forward Plan Select Committee that has taken place, members were briefed on the Delegation of Anti-Social Behaviour Order Functions to Brent Housing Partnership and the Strategic Review of Sports Centre Provision in Brent. With regard to the first item, the select committee asked that a further briefing note be provided updating Members with regard to the Community Safety Team's role once ASBO functions have been delegated to BHP and asking that the Lead Member and Lead Officer attend the meeting. The relevant Lead Member and Lead Officer have also been asked to attend the next meeting to answer questions on the latter item.

The Forward Plan Select Committee raised its concern that public consultation on matters such as the North Circular Road Regeneration and Strategic Review of Sports Centres within Brent often seemed to occur after decisions had effectively been made. The Select Committee expressed the view that all Council consultations should be genuine and transparent and requested the Executive to ensure that future consultations take place before decisions are taken.

At the time of writing the Health Select Committee is due to meet on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2008. It will be considering the results of the 2007/08 National Patient Satisfaction survey on GP access, NHS Brent's plans for a GP led health centre, the preparation by NHS Brent for its World Class Commissioning Assessment (NHS Brent Strategic Plan), action that has been taken to improve services at Willesden Centre for Health and Care following an external review and progress on what is happening at Monks Park Health Centre.

The Budget Panel continues its work on scrutinising the 2009/10 budget. At its last meeting the panel heard from the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham on how it had approached savings and efficiency measures since 2006. The panel was informed that it had been possible to make a 3% reduction in council tax in difficult financial conditions by means of close working between the Cabinet and Corporate Management Team, road shows with staff, market-testing of a range of services, careful management of vacancies, a strategy to reduce debt and a change in the relationship with the unions. The Council's Director of Finance and Corporate Resources reminded members that Brent worked with Hammersmith and Fulham as part of the West London Alliance to achieve efficiencies through joint procurement and to explore other new ideas for savings. He added that market testing of services was not an option open to Brent, as the relevant services had already been contracted out. Nor was a programme of asset sales possible, as Brent's asset base was relatively small and was needed for the capital programme, for example, to finance extra school places. The panel concluded that, given the differences between the

two boroughs in size, asset base, history, and political, financial and organisational starting points, the degree to which Brent could learn from the experience of Hammersmith and Fulham was limited, apart from continuing to reap the benefits of work and co-operation within the West London Alliance.

The panel was updated on the budget process for 2009/10 and subsequent years and presented with a proposed first tranche of budget savings directed towards savings targets for 2009/10. The Executive considered this at its meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2008, and the key aspect for the Executive was to agree the first tranche of savings. Councillor Blackman (Lead Member for Resources) attended the Budget Panel to obtain members' views to take to the 6<sup>th</sup> October meeting.

The panel also considered the approach adopted to fund priority growth agreed by the Executive in July 2008 and the process for agreeing priorities for funding. Members were informed that LAA priorities would be financed by means of a mixture of funding, much of it from the mainstream budget. The panel agreed to give consideration at a future meeting to the results of an analysis of the current use of alternative funding sources.

At the time of writing the Budget Panel is due to meet again on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2008 to consider proposals for revising the approach to the Schools Capital Programme, progress on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, and comment on the fees and charges policy and identify what further information it would like to be provided with on the development of the policy during the budget process. The Panel will be asked to note that in order for the setting of some fees and charges to be delegated to officers, as proposed by the policy, a change will be required to the constitution of the Council.