

**LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT****Full Council – 13<sup>th</sup> July 2009****Report from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

My last report to Council was on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2009 and so there has been a lot of activity since then. I will briefly cover the topics that the committees and select committees have been undertaking.

Earlier in the year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee heard from Tony Ellis (Head of IT) on future plans for Members' IT. The Committee was reminded that the IT unit had moved into the new Business Transformation Department and the need for a review of IT provision for Members had already been raised with the new Director. Members asked that the outcome of the review be presented to a future meeting of the committee.

The Leader of the Council addressed the committee and answered questions on the progress being made in meeting the six corporate priorities which he had previously reported to the Committee. He was asked to report back to the committee on:

- The impact of the recession on local people and how the Council is responding to this,
- Progress on delivering the improvement programme,
- Progress on providing new social housing, and
- Efforts made to recruit more permanent social care staff.

He will be doing this to the next meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2009.

I reported to the committee on the visit by members to the Strathcona Day Centre, including the visit to ASPPECT (Autism Services Promoting Partnership, Empowerment, Creativity and Teamwork). At a subsequent meeting, the committee received an update on the learning disabilities day care consultation being carried out. The committee has asked to be informed of the outcome of the assessments in September and for a follow up visit to Strathcona to be arranged.

In March, the committee received an update on implementation of the Increasing Participation in Sport through Sports Clubs task group recommendations. Members were pleased to receive such a report that tracked progress of the task group recommendations. Further suggestions for achieving some of the task group recommendations were made and a further report on progress will be made in the Autumn. A similar update on implementing the recommendations of the Town Centre Regeneration task group has also been considered.

The committee has been updated on the progress of implementing the Council's One Stop Service Redesign Project. Members were re-assured that some of the issues previously raised about the service were being addressed but remained concerned at the effect the recession would have. Members asked to be given a further update, including an analysis of the range of issues being dealt with by the One Stop Service and this will be presented to the next meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> July.

A very interesting report on the local impact of the recession was considered by the committee. A similar report had been presented to the Executive. Members asked that reports monitoring the recession's impact on Brent based on performance indicators designed to measure this be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny.

The committee has been briefed on the scope of the Council's Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy which is to be developed and implemented over the next 5 years. Members expressed interest in receiving feedback on the developing relationship between the Council and the third sector. The committee has asked to be informed of the effectiveness of the Council's grant-tracking software and to consider the issue of procurement in relation to the third sector in the context of overview and scrutiny work on procurement across the Council.

The committee was recently informed about the work of the Crime Prevention Strategy Group, Brent's Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. Members heard that crime prevention partnerships were being introduced in order to bring together the work of the various agencies involved, in line with the Police and Justice Act 2006, which made working together obligatory. Brent's partnership is chaired by the Council's Chief Executive and the Borough Commander is Vice Chair. The committee was briefed on its role in scrutinising the work of the partnership. Existing task groups, such as on help for people exiting prostitution and the committee's work on the impact of the recession were examples of current activities being undertaken. Other areas included the possibility of undertaking work looking at gangs in the borough and consideration of the issue of safety at school gates. Members noted that other bodies also had a role in looking at the work of the partnership such as the Local Strategic Partnership Board and the Performance and Finance Select Committee. After discussion it was agreed that, in addition to continuing work on existing task groups, the following aspects of the work of the partnership should be monitored by the committee:

- the community payback operation, which provides the opportunity for local people to have a say on how people who have committed crimes should make amends
- instances of stop and search carried out under Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, and
- the monitoring and resettlement of offenders.

Early in the year, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on work to tackle homophobic bullying in schools and heard from a number of those involved in this work. At the same time the committee considered what it felt to be a very good report on the education provision in special projects for secondary aged children who were new arrivals in Brent. It also received an update on primary and secondary school places, including the numbers of children without a place at that time and measures being

taken to provide suitable education provision for children out of school. The committee has since been kept up to date on the provision of school places.

Members of the committee have been informed of the additional support being made available to Somali parents. Acknowledging that there was a relatively high proportion of Somali boys and girls in Brent's schools and that there was some dissatisfaction over the level of support offered by some schools, the committee felt the programme of support should be extended and that a progress report should be submitted to the committee early next year.

The committee considered the operational and strategic child protection arrangements in place in Brent, in light of the death of 'Baby P'. This included hearing from a police representative of the Brent & Harrow Child Abuse Investigation Team. The committee noted the substantial actions being taken at that time by the Council and requested that the committee have a greater role, through its chair in the arrangements being established to ensure the borough's child protection measures were adequate.

The committee was pleased to be informed of the internal bid being made by NHS Brent to increase the number of school nurses in the borough and plans to develop the role at a more professional level. The Chair has subsequently been assured that the commitment to named school nurses for primary and specialist nurses for secondary schools will be met.

Brent Youth Parliament is in its second year of operation and members of the committee heard of the good progress made in developing its work. The current campaign of breaking down the stereotypes of young people was supported and it was felt that a BYP representative should be invited to each meeting of the committee.

The committee has considered key trends in education standards in Brent. It was noted that attainment was below average early on, but then above average later, which was a credit to the system. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that more needed to be done earlier, and the authority is in a better position now than it had been to support early years education. However, many children come into early years education with low starting points. Heads are discussing how best to deal with this and how to engage parents. The importance of literacy was emphasised. The committee will be considering pupil achievement related to ethnicity.

The work of the Youth Strategy Group which has met several times to discuss how best to improve services for young people in Brent has been considered by the committee. A review of the Youth Service is soon to be carried out and the committee has asked for a report on the scope of the review to its October meeting.

The committee has been briefed on the significance of the Building Schools for the Future programme, entitled *Transforming Learning in Brent*. Members were keen to know as soon as possible the outcome of the bid and it was agreed the item should become a standing item on the agenda for meetings of the committee.

In February the Health Select Committee was further updated on the position of the North West London Hospitals NHS Trust's finances and on the steps being taken by the Trust to break—even by the end of the financial year. At its following meeting the select committee was informed of the substantial savings achieved and the remaining challenges facing the

Trust in the current financial year and the select committee has continued to monitor this situation.

The select committee has received a report outlining the Healthcare Commission's Annual Health Check process for 2008/09, and the self declarations made by each of the local NHS trusts – NHS Brent, the North West London Hospitals NHS Trust, and the Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust. Representatives of each of the three trusts briefed the select committee and answered questions from members. The chair was delegated the task of agreeing the detail of a response to the declarations made by each trust.

In response to the London-wide consultation on proposals to deliver new specialist hospitals across London, the select committee submitted a response based on support for siting a hyper-acute stroke unit at Northwick Park and a major trauma centre at St Mary's.

More recently the select committee has considered the work of NHS Brent and partners in response to the swine flu outbreak and has agreed to further consider the position if circumstances warrant this.

The select committee has heard from the Chief Executive of NHS Brent on the work that NHS Brent had done to improve access to GP services in the borough. He reported that there had been three important initiatives to improve access – funding for extended hours, the establishment of a GP-led health centre in Wembley and work with GP practices on development and efficiency with a view to ensuring that booking processes were transparent. A total of 77% of GP practices - a higher level than in other PCTs locally - are offering extended hours under what is a voluntary scheme.

The Performance & Finance Select Committee earlier in the year considered the initial recommendations of the task group on Community Use of Council-Owned Assets and at a subsequent meeting agreed the final recommendations. The report of the task group is shortly to be submitted to the Executive.

As part of its regular performance monitoring role, the select committee has looked at the waste contract, covering recycling, waste collection and street cleansing and all areas have shown improvements in performance. It has also considered the performance of the revenues service. Another regular item of business for the select committee is considering the performance of the Council within the old Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) regime and now under the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) framework. It noted that the last CPA refresh score showed the Council to be a strong 3 star authority. At its most recent meeting members were updated on the CAA framework and the additional work being undertaken to meet the requirements of CAA.

The Forward Plan Select Committee continues to meet regularly to monitor the Executive's work programme. It has considered many issues arising from consideration of the forward plan and since my last report to Council it has also considered decisions of the Executive on the following items which have been called in and responded as indicated:

*Petition against the Kingsbury Road Local Safety Scheme*

The select committee asked that the Executive re-consider the scheme and following the decision of the Executive not to, the matter was referred to Full Council.

*Housing Strategy 2009-14*

The select committee noted the decisions of the Executive and asked that an action plan be put in place to expand the Houses in Multiple Occupation registration scheme. The Executive responded by asking that a briefing note be prepared for the select committee

suggesting the need for central government lobbying or for it to put forward a growth bid to carry out this work.

*Supply and Demand of Temporary Accommodation*

Upon considering this matter further in the light of information provided by the Director of Housing and Community Care, the select committee had no further comments to make on the decisions of the Executive.

*North Circular road Regeneration Area*

After a long discussion on this, the select committee asked the Executive to agree that priority be given to resolving the problems of the Brentfield Road/North Circular Road junction before any decision to demolish properties on that section of the North Circular Road and to submit a bid to Transport for London for a major redesign of this junction. It also asked that the vision of a new parkland setting for the Shri Swaminarayan Temple be removed given the low level of support for it. The Executive subsequently agreed to a bid being made to TfL regarding the Brentfield Road/North Circular Road junction.

*Local Development Framework – Core Strategy and Site Specific Allocations*

Having considered the decisions of the Executive, the select committee asked that consideration be given to ways of developing Kilburn High Road in partnership with the London Borough of Camden. The Executive noted the view of the select committee.

*Wembley Masterplan: Consultation – Adoption as a Supplementary Planning document*

After a very full discussion the select committee had no further recommendations to put back to the Executive.