



# **Overview & Scrutiny**

**Annual Report 2006 – 2007**

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**Foreword by Cllr Dorman Long,  
Chair, Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

2006/7 was an important year for Overview & Scrutiny in Brent, during which we reviewed the structure and function of our committees and developed a more complete and streamlined approach to our work. The Council is now in a good position to rise to the challenges mapped out in the emerging Local Government Bill, which will include a wider role for scrutiny in holding to account key partners within the borough to ensure continuous service improvement for our community.

One significant change this year has been the introduction of a dedicated Budget Scrutiny Panel, which allows non-executive members to more effectively engage with and influence the budget setting process, assessing the administrations priorities and budget proposals.

We have been working hard to raise the profile of Overview & Scrutiny in Brent, encouraging greater input from our diverse community, developing varied work programmes and initiating task group work targeted at prevalent issues of concern or interest. We have also revamped our quarterly newsletter "*Spotlight*" which keeps members and the public up to speed on current work and developments, encouraging input and suggestions for future topics via the council website.

The Overview & Scrutiny committees have set up a number of task groups focussing on a varied collection of issues. These have included in-depth work examining the turnaround programme of Brent teaching Primary Care Trust and its impact on local people, a review of voluntary sector funding, and an assessment of ways to improve the outcomes of some of the borough's under achieving young people.

Following last year's local elections a number of new members were elected, providing scrutiny with new ideas and interests. We have worked to support all members in their scrutiny role, building the capacity of the committees to challenge and inform the Executive and partner organisations.

The coming year promises further challenges, with increased focus on the "place shaping" and neighbourhood role of councils. Furthermore, new mechanisms are being developed to enable scrutiny to act more directly to resolve issues raised at a grassroots level. We believe that the structure we have in place offers the required flexibility and vigour to progress change locally in parallel with national developments.

This annual report provides a summary of the work of the overview and scrutiny activities within Brent over the last year. We would welcome your comments and suggestions in continuing to improve this key function.

## Section 1. Context

### What is Overview and Scrutiny?

Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) is a process independent of the council's Executive which has a statutory basis<sup>1</sup> from which to review existing policy, develop new options for improving services, hold the council's Executive and partner agencies to account, and check the delivery and performance of council services against agreed aims.

Overview & Scrutiny can provide a constructive challenge to the Executive, allowing members of all political groups to investigate issues from a non-political view point. It is an evidence based process which engages non-executive (frontline) members and community representatives more closely in the council's decision-making process.

Overview & Scrutiny is a member led process which has adopted an overarching approach to cross-cutting issues. This is a conscious departure from previous service based committees and is an attempt to look at issues from a community perspective.

Local Councillors work closely with officers from across the authority to focus the work of the council's O&S Committees and champion issues through structured work programmes. Councillors chair O&S committees, setting their agenda, steering in-depth investigations, and endorsing recommendations for consideration by the Executive. O&S has built up a reputation as a credible and influential source of advice, analysis, and future policy options.

Scrutiny meetings take place in a variety of settings. Whilst formal meetings are predominantly committee based, task group work allows for greater flexibility with meetings and focused sessions within the community. Targeted panels and visits are good ways of gaining a snapshot of an issue locally or testing services from a user perspective.

Increasingly the activities of partner agencies are an important element of scrutiny work. Particularly in areas such as health & social care, community safety, and children & families where co-opted members<sup>2</sup> are appointed to consider education matters.

It is likely that the forthcoming Local Government Act will make greater provision for scrutiny of external bodies in relation to the wider community as well as the council itself in order to meet wider community objectives.

Effective overview & scrutiny provides:

- Constructive challenge
- Independent, evidence based review
- Non-political- work by consensus
- Overarching and cross-cutting investigation
- Enhanced community focus

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<sup>1</sup> (A) Overview & Scrutiny Committees were established in 2000 as part of the Government's Local Government Modernisation Agenda.

(B) There legislative basis is outlined in the Local Government Acts of 2000 (Part1, Section 21), and 2003 (Part 8, Chapter 1,Section 115), and has been extended by the Health and Social Care Act 2001 (Part 1, Chapter 15, Section 7- *Local Authority scrutiny of health service provision*).

(C) The Overview and Scrutiny function is outlined in Article 6 (Parts, 1, 2, &3), Part 5 (Terms of reference), and in Standing Orders (21) & (22) of the Council's Constitution.

<sup>2</sup> Co-optees are appointed to provide expert support and representation from particular faith groups.

## **Brent's New Overview & Scrutiny Structure**

### **Context of the review**

In May 2006 Brent council set up a Constitutional Working Group. Made up of leading members from each political group one of its purposes was to review, the council's overview & scrutiny structures.

A key characteristic of the previous overview scrutiny structure, introduced in 2001, was a split between the overview & scrutiny function which separated policy review and development from scrutiny of implementation. Although it was functional and delivered some successful outcomes, there was a need to review and change our approach to meet the new challenges facing Brent Council.

Our restructure was informed by Brent's Corporate Assessment 2006<sup>3</sup> which provided the council with an external perspective. Whilst the council's Corporate Assessment led to a three star rating, an improvement on the previous assessment in 2002, the report clearly highlighted some important issues in relation to the overview and scrutiny structure and function. Comments included:

"The Council's approach to overview and scrutiny has a number of strengths, including the Overview Committee, Performance and Finance Select Committee, supporting task groups that provide internal challenge. These meetings are well chaired, supported by officers and address priority issues" (63), page 19.

"There are good examples of impact in terms of policy development in waste management and health scrutiny work on tuberculosis" (63), page 19.

However the Corporate Assessment also identified the following:

"a small part of the overview and scrutiny process, namely the scrutiny panels are not sufficiently contributing to service improvements and would benefit from more consistent officer support and more focused agendas." (63), page 19.

"not all political parties are sufficiently engaged and this potentially limits the ability for all residents to be fully represented in the democratic process" (62), page 19.

"there is scope to improve councillor involvement in high profile preliminary discussions" (63), page 19.

It was recognised that some parts of the previous structure had worked well and should be retained, specifically the Forward Plan Select Committee, the Performance and Finance Select Committees and the Health Overview Committee. It was also recognised that other parts of the previous structure had not worked as well and needed to change, in particular the service based scrutiny panels did not have the impact that had been envisaged when they were set up.

Call-in arrangements were also reviewed by the Constitutional Working Group. Previously it had been thought that call-in would be a contentious issue and the arrangements had been ultra-cautious imposing a high Member threshold. In reality call-in had not been the formidable tool it had been perceived it would be and while call-in is no substitute for proper pre-scrutiny and questioning at the Forward Plan Select Committee it was recognised that it was time to reduce the threshold for the number of members needed to trigger a call-in to bring it in line with most other local authorities.

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<sup>3</sup> A copy of Brent Council's Corporate Assessment can be found on the Audit Commissions website

When undertaking the review and the Constitutional Working Group (CWG) also took into account the Local Government White Paper and the Police and Criminal Justice Act, which was expected to make provision for the extension of the role of overview and scrutiny. This extended role included powers to scrutinise public service providers, partnership arrangements, strategic issues such as the Local Area Agreement, and hold the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to account, and consider issues raised as 'Community Calls for Action'.

### **The New Structure**

The Constitutional Working Group was keen to ensure that the new overview and scrutiny model would:

- Challenge the Executive
- Contribute to policy development and review
- Contribute to better decision making
- Monitor performance including external contractors
- Scrutinise partners and partnerships

It was clear to the Constitutional Working Group that the work of the task groups, set up in the previous overview and scrutiny function to develop and review policy had delivered real benefits to the council and the local community and should become a key component of the new overview and scrutiny model.

The new structure comprises of an overarching Overview & Scrutiny Committee, three Select Committees with a distinct focus and remit and a Budget Panel to provide more in depth robust budget scrutiny. The select committees are: the Health Select Committee, Forward Plan Select Committee, Performance and Finance Select Committee. In addition there is the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which includes education co-optees. The aim was to ensure that the best of the old arrangements were kept, that child protection issues have a clear home within the structure and that we have learnt from the problems encountered in the past.

In addition, an Audit Committee was established in accordance with CIPFA<sup>4</sup> guidance, to consider the Head of Internal Audit's annual report, strategic audit plans, and to consider the level of assurance these can give over the council's corporate governance arrangements.

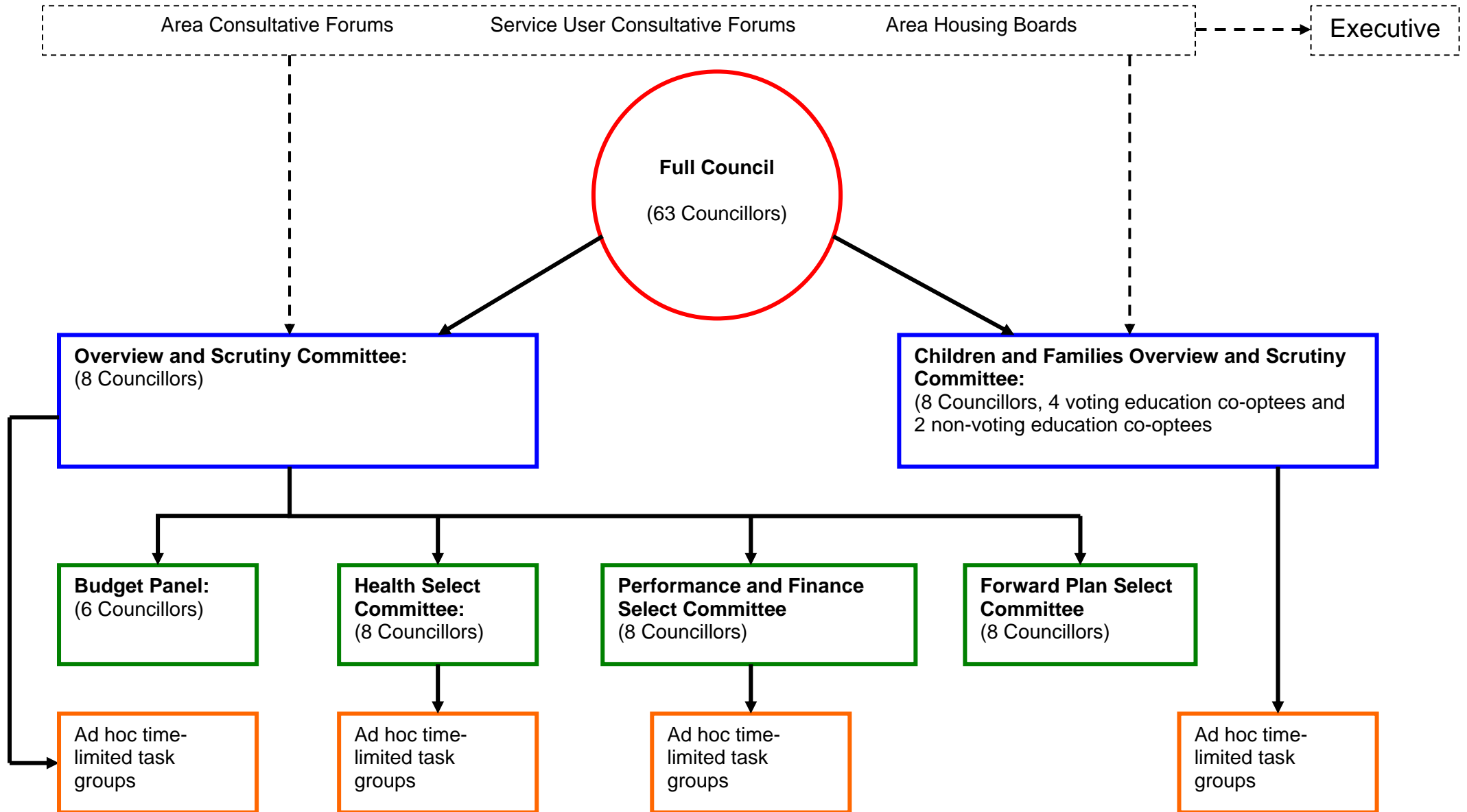
Section two of this report outlines the remit of each of the new committees and details the work of each committee including outcomes and achievements.

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<sup>4</sup> Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.



# London Borough of Brent Overview and Scrutiny Structure



## **Links to the Brent Corporate Strategy**

Brent Council has set out its priorities and ambitions for the next four years in its Corporate Strategy 2006-2010. The committees in the new Overview & Scrutiny structure have sought to monitor and challenge how the vision outlined in the Corporate Strategy will be implemented by ensuring that their work programmes focus on key aspects of the strategy and how key targets and objectives are being met. By providing this focus scrutiny becomes more relevant to local people and can play a significant role in engaging with the local community, helping the Council to make better decisions, and enhancing the efficiency of the organisation overall.

The purpose of this section of the report is to provide examples from each committee of how this has been achieved during 2006/7. Full details of the work and achievements of each committee are provided in section two of this report.

### ***A great place***

*Clean & Green* -The Performance & Finance Select Committee has agreed to establish a review group to look at monitoring the new waste management contract and how best performance information can be communicated to members. This has helped promote and improve Brent as “a clean and green place”.

*Safe* – Brent’s new corporate strategy says that the council will maximise the effectiveness of existing CCTV installations and develop criteria for the future extension of it through partnerships where possible. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee investigated how the new CCTV strategy was being developed, whether key aspects would meet the objectives of the Corporate Strategy, and suggested areas for further development.

*Lively* -The Overview & Scrutiny Committee has recently established a task group to “increase participation in sport” looking at the development of sustainable sports clubs in the borough and encouraging community groups to provide quality sports opportunities.

A Tourism task group is currently finalising its report into ways to attract and retain visitors to Brent, marketing the borough nationally and internationally.

### ***A borough of opportunity***

*Local employment and enterprise* - The Overview & Scrutiny Committee recently agreed to set up a task group to look at Town Centre Regeneration.

*Health and well being* - Health and well-being is a key focus of the work of the Health Select Committee which has reviewed the plans and performance of the local NHS trusts providing services to local residents. Health inequalities and access to healthcare have been prevalent issues since the Committee’s creation. This has included updates on services for teenage pregnancy and substance abuse.

*Help when you need it* – The tPCT turnaround task group was established to examine the impact of the Turnaround Plan presented to the Board of Brent tPCT in November 2006. The impact of the proposed savings were considered from the point of view of the local community, with emphasis placed on those vulnerable people most at risk from cuts to services.



## ***One community***

*Settled homes-* Previous scrutiny work has reviewed the council's Empty Properties Strategy seeking to identify private houses that can be brought back into use and made into homes for local people.

*Early excellence* - The Children & Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee is completing a task group looking at improving outcomes for African Caribbean and Black African Pupils which looks at a range of social factors and the borough's role in enabling and supporting particular groups.

*Community engagement-* The Health Select Committee has recently conducted a task group on Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) which involved consultation with public and patient involvement forums from local NHS trusts.

The Voluntary Sector Funding task group was set up to review how the council's Main Programme Grant Fund is allocated to ensure better fit with community and corporate priorities as well as reinvigorate the relationship between the voluntary and community sector and the council.

*Civic Leadership* – The new Overview & Scrutiny structure is better placed to scrutinise the work of partners, the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and the Local Area Agreement (LAA). As part of this process the Overview & Scrutiny committee now receive an annual LSP and LAA report.

*Building Capacity-* This was the first year of operation for the Budget Panel. The Panel's initial work was aimed at influencing the development of the administration's budget focusing on: Implementing the Corporate Strategy, the budget gap, budget pressures, central services and the capital programme. The Panel then had the opportunity to make recommendations on the draft budget prior to it going to council.

## **Section 2. The Work and Achievements of the Committees**



### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2006/7**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a wide remit, which includes council services (except those in relation to Children and Families), scrutinising partners, the LSP and the LAA, scrutinising the implementation of the corporate strategy and post decision scrutiny. It was therefore critical to the success of the committee that a well planned work programme was developed. Members agreed early in the process that we would need to connect with the council's priorities and community concerns to be able to engage with councillors and the public and ensure the committee has the potential to add value to the work of the council. Service link officers were appointed to feed into the process, take responsibility for the provision of evidence and provide updates on the implementation and impact of recommendations.

The Committee's first two meetings were used to discuss its role, agree the guiding principles that would provide the conditions for the Committee to be effective and discuss criteria for selecting topics for review. It was within this context that we then examined the council's new Corporate Strategy, and discussed suggested topics for in depth task group reviews. This was time well spent as it resulted in a work programme that we believe is balanced, timely, provides opportunities for more frontline councillors and local communities to become involved in policy development, provides constructive challenge to the priorities of the administration and monitors the impact of the Committees work.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee comprises of eight Councillors and is politically balanced.

### **2006 – 2007 Membership**

Councillor Dorman Long (Chair)  
Councillor David Clues (Vice Chair)  
Councillor John Detre  
Councillor Ralph Fox  
Councillor Chris Leaman  
Councillor Alan Mendoza  
Councillor Gavin Sneddon  
Councillor Bobby Thomas

### **The work of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee 2006/7**

The time taken to form a new administration at the start of the municipal year, and changes to the constitution delayed the start of the Overview & Scrutiny cycle, meant that the committee met on four occasions rather than six, reducing the timeframe within which it could carry out its work.

Nevertheless the Committee has still been able to impact on some key areas of work that affect our local communities.

### **CCTV Strategy**

Brent's new Corporate Strategy says that the council will maximise the effectiveness of existing CCTV installations and develop criteria for the future extension of it through partnerships where possible. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee investigated how the new CCTV strategy was being developed, whether key aspects of the CCTV strategy would meet the objectives of the corporate strategy, and suggested areas for further development.

### **Warden Reassurance Services in Brent**

Members of the Committee requested a report on the provision of warden services in Brent. We wanted to understand their role, investigate the benefits they would provide to local communities and the contribution they could make to the targets set out in the Crime & Disorder Reduction Strategy.

### **Area and Service User Forums and Consultation Updates**

We have received regular updates on key issues and trends from the Area and Service User forums as well as from other forms of consultation. This has enabled us to respond quickly by requesting updates from services or by ensuring issues are included on the Committees work programme.

### **The IT Strategy**

The Committee has agreed to play an ongoing role in monitoring the implementation and impact of Brent's new IT strategy to ensure that it delivers the specified benefits to the organisation and our local communities. We started this process soon after the strategy was agreed by the Executive by receiving a presentation from the Head of IT. Members raised a number of issues that will be taken on board during the implementation of the strategy particularly in relation to transactional services, customer access, security, and the council's website. The committee has ensured that regular updates on implementation are timetabled into its ongoing work programme.

### **Protection of Vulnerable Adults Report**

The Committee received a report which outlined the work of the Adult Protection Committee, provides information on adult protection referrals and outlined priorities for the forthcoming year.

### **Community Care Annual Report on Complaints**

This report provided information about the context and operation of the complaints procedure, the number and type of complaints made during the year and how they were dealt with. Members of the Committee questioned the council's performance against other authorities and asked for comparison information to be available in future.

### **Co-ordinating the Overview & Scrutiny function**

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is responsible for co-ordinating the work of the all of the committees within the overview and scrutiny structure. It ensures that there is no duplication or gaps in the work programmes and ensures that the appropriate resources, officer support for instance, are available to the committee and the task groups they set up.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee commissioned two task groups.

### **Voluntary Sector Funding Task Group**

The Council's Main Programme Grant fund provides just under £1 million per year in grants to local voluntary agencies. Much of the funding is allocated on an 'historical'

basis and for a number of years there has been little change in the organisations that receive funding, and the levels of funding provided. It is very difficult for currently unfunded organisations, emerging communities or new organisations to access council resources which leads to questions about inequality and whether the Council is getting the best value it can for the money it spends.

In order to complete its work and produce a set of recommendations that deliver benefits to local communities, the task group decided early in the review that it was important to hear the views of as many members of the voluntary sector as possible. The task group has been focusing on Brent specific issues while taking into account the national agenda and learning from other local authorities.

The task group reported in May 2007.

### **Tourism Task Group**

The London Borough of Brent can rightfully be described as a prime area for tourism. It is home to the world famous Wembley Stadium, award winning parks, restaurants and outstanding religious buildings including the Neasden Temple. Despite this, the council does not have a dedicated resource to manage and promote the flow of internal and external visitors to the borough. The prime focus of the committee was to consider whether current delivery of tourism is maximising benefits to the local economy. Members also looked at a brand for Brent, providing information on Brent attractions and encouraging business tourism.

Task group members were keen to look at how tourism related activity was co-ordinated across the council. Discussions were held with a wide range of officers within relevant departments as well as external partners. The final report will be considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in July.



## **Budget Panel 2006/7**

This was the first year of operation for the Budget Panel and an important budget for the council. The council was at the start of a new administration, had just agreed a new Corporate Strategy, and was facing significant budget pressures from a tight government financial settlement and Brent PCT's financial problems. In addition to these challenges, constitutional changes had delayed start to the Overview & Scrutiny cycle, and there had been a delay in forming an administration following the local elections which meant that the Budget Panel started its work later than we would have liked to due to constitutional changes.

Given these circumstances members of the Panel were keen to take a strategic view of the budget and budget process. This included focussing on the administrations priorities and how it intended to deliver them and gaining a good understanding of the pressures and longer term issues facing individual services. The panel's terms of reference included examining:

- The principles for budget setting
- The robustness of the budget and the ability to deliver savings
- Key revenue budget outputs and decisions
- Key capital budget outputs and decisions
- The Medium Term Financial Strategy

To 'kick start' our work members of the Panel were invited to take part in a training session provided by the Institute of Public Finance on effective Financial and Budget Scrutiny. This was an invaluable resource and provided a basis for our work and in particular for the development of our work programme.

Our initial work was aimed at influencing the development of the administrations budget. We received evidence from many sources, including service departments, and focussed on the following areas:

- Implementing the Corporate Strategy
- The budget gap
- Budget pressures
- Central services
- The capital programme

Once the administration's draft budget was published we had the opportunity to question the Lead Member for Corporate Resources on key elements of the budget proposals. This provided the panel with the opportunity to make recommendations prior to the draft budget being agreed by the Executive.

Finally members wanted to establish the effectiveness of their work by evaluating the budget scrutiny process and the impact of our recommendations. Some of the recommendations were implemented during the budget development process, other recommendations related more to the medium term. The panel has therefore ensured

that a process of monitoring the recommendations has been built into the Budget Panel's work programme for the coming year.

During the budget scrutiny process we had three opportunities to make our views known. These were:

- **The First interim report** – prior to the draft budget being published.
- **The Second interim report** – this built on the first report and included recommendations on the draft budget prior to it being agreed by the Executive.
- **The Final report** – this report went to Full Council built on the second report and included recommendations on
  - The Executive's final budget prior to it being debated at Full Council;
  - The budget process; and
  - The budget scrutiny process

There is no doubt that the establishment of a dedicated Budget Scrutiny Panel has greatly enhanced the way Brent Council's budget is scrutinised. It has allowed members of the panel to develop a better more in depth understanding of the budget process, strategic financial issues and financial pressures faced by the services. It has also provided increased opportunities for member involvement and member ability to identify the key issues and influence both officers and the administration.

#### **2006- 2007 Membership**

Councillor Alan Mendoza (Chair)  
Councillor Robin Pagnamenta (Vice Chair)  
Councillor Mark Cummins  
Councillor Ann John  
Councillor Jim Moher  
Councillor Vijay K Shah



### **Health Select Committee 2006/7**

The Health Select Committee has built on the role established by its predecessor the Health Overview Panel, playing a key role in scrutinising the performance of local NHS Trusts, informing policy development within the council, and promoting well-being across the borough. It has continued its focus on health inequalities and preventative healthcare, it takes a strategic overview of health services in Brent, facilitates partnership working and promotes further public engagement.

The Health and Social Care Act 2001 extended the powers of scrutiny of all local authorities in England and Wales with social services responsibilities, to cover local NHS bodies. It requires local authorities to appoint an overview and scrutiny committee to review and scrutinise local NHS bodies and matters relating to the health service in their area. The Committee has a formal role in responding to the Healthcare Commission's Annual Health Check (AHC) which serves as a snapshot of trust performance, highlighting areas of concern and issues for further investigation. Members have developed positive relationships with partners providing health and social care services to the people of Brent.

The Committee comprises 8 Councillors and is politically balanced. The Chair and Chief Executive of Brent teaching Primary Care Trust (tPCT) regularly attended meetings, along with senior personnel from North West London Hospitals NHS Trust, and Central & North West London NHS Foundation Trust (formerly Mental Health NHS Trust). Representatives from local patient groups and voluntary organisations have also been regularly invited to attend meeting.

### **2006-2007 Membership**

Cllr Rev. David Clues (Chair)  
Cllr Mary Farrell (Vice Chair)  
Cllr Anthony Dunn (Cllr Derek Jackson replaced Cllr Dunn in early 2007)  
Cllr Hayley Matthews  
Cllr Ralph Fox  
Cllr Colum Moloney  
Cllr Eddie Baker  
Cllr John Detre

### **The work of the Health Select Committee 2006/7**

Following the constitutional changes and a delayed start to the Overview & Scrutiny cycle, the Committee experienced a reduced timeframe within which to carry out its work in 2006/7. However, such delay allowed for increased training for new members following the May 2006 elections.

The Committee attained the following achievements:

### **NHS Trust updates**

The Committee has received regular updates on the financial position and savings proposals forwarded by each local trust. It has been given an overview of key changes in the sector in response to the "Our health, our care, our say" white paper, and management restructuring.

### **Brent tPCT Turnaround Plan Task Group**

In December 2006 the Committee established a cross-party task group to examine the impact of the Turnaround Plan presented to the Board of Brent tPCT in November 2006. The task group sought detailed information and documentation regarding proposed savings within the plan, and to consider the potential impact of proposals on the local community. The Task Group gathered evidence from independent witnesses and experts. The impact of the proposed savings were considered from the point of view of the local community, with emphasis placed on those vulnerable people most at risk from cuts to services. The task group structured its work programme around the key objectives highlighted in the plan, adopting Local Health Economy, Commissioning & Demand Management, Provider Services, and Internal as themes for investigation.

The task group forwarded a number of recommendations including; a public hearing, establishing a task group panel on NHS finances, an independent review of the Turnaround Plan's Health Impact Assessment, and referrals to the Council's other Overview & Scrutiny Committees on specific stands of the plan.

### **Consultation on Central & North West London Mental Health NHS Trust (CNWLMHT) Foundation Trust application**

In October the Committee was consulted on CNWLMHT's bid to become a foundation trust. This would allow the trust greater independence from the Department of Health and enhance local accountability. Councillors were able to question senior officers on the benefits and potential risks of the change in status. Authorisation was granted to the Trust in May 2007<sup>5</sup>.

### **Update on North West London Hospitals NHS Trust: Maternal Deaths**

Members received a presentation from the Trust's Chief Executive on the findings of the Healthcare Commission's investigation into 10 maternal deaths at, or following delivery at, Northwick Park Hospital between April 2002 and April 2005. The report provided an insight into proposed changes and those improvement actions to be undertaken in the future.

### **NWLHNSHST- Reconfiguration/Change of the Better**

The Committee received a report outlining the "*NWLH NHS Trust Strategic Reconfiguration Project- Involvement Strategy and Clinical Model*". In October, North West London Hospitals NHS Trust, Brent tPCT, and Harrow PCT launched a joint discussion document "*Change for the Better: A discussion programme to plan health service changes together*". This document sought the views of local people regarding local health services and their future delivery. The consultation aimed at exploring the best model for clinical care and its outcomes are to be considered within the wider context of a London wide review by the Strategic Health Authority in the summer of 2007.

### **Local Involvement Networks (LINKS) & Public and Patient Involvement Forums (PPIF)**

In response to the Department of Health's consultation "A stronger local voice"<sup>6</sup> the committee established a task group to consider how LINKs relate to both the Council structure and the Health and Social Care Partnership Board of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). Brent tPCT's PPIF was invited to join the task group and help develop

<sup>5</sup> Applications are authorised by Monitor, the Independent Regulator for Foundation Trusts.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Health Consultation "*A stronger local voice- Development of Local Involvement (LINKs) and Future of Public Patient Involvement Forums (PPIFs)*", July 2006.



its recommendations which included: formalising links between the committee and local patient groups, a ring fencing of future funding, and further development work pending legislation.

#### **Health Care Commission (HCC) Annual Health Check**

The Committee has formally responded to the second year of the HCC's performance audit, with local NHS trusts submitting a self declaration to overview & scrutiny for formal comment. NHS trusts are required to include unedited comments of the committee in their final declarations to the HCC in relation to core standards.

The committee is keen to enhance the evidence base from which it comments on local trust performance as part of its 2007-8 work programme.

#### **Teenage Pregnancy**

The Committee received an update with regard to progress on recommendations from a previous task group established by the former Health Overview Panel in 2004, which examined the effectiveness of services in promoting the sexual health of young people in the borough.

#### **Khat/Pan**

The Committee received an update from the Drugs Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) concerning problems associated with Khat usage, a narcotic substance used by some members of the Somali community.



## **Performance and Finance Select Committee 2006/7**

In the three meetings since the new overview and scrutiny arrangements have been in place, the Performance and Finance Select Committee has continued to review and challenge performance, across a wide spectrum of council activities and services. "Exception reporting" has enabled the Select Committee to consider performance weaknesses in a number of areas. Issues that have been scrutinised included the new combined domestic waste collection, recycling and street cleaning contract, the quarterly "Vital Signs" performance information digest, the "Best Value Performance Indicator" satisfaction survey, the "Improving Brent Action Plan", the "Best Value Performance Plan", the "Annual Complaints Report" and reports back on progress against the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment targets. There were regular updates on the performance of the Revenue and Benefits Service with attendance at meetings by representatives from Capita.

The Committee has added value in its challenge to poor performance, its encouragement to service areas in their endeavours and its continued regular high level monitoring of the revenue and benefits service. A particular area of concern that will continue to receive high level attention is the borough's performance – in both relative and absolute terms – in Council Tax collection; without improvements in this area, the authority's ability to deliver services to residents will continue to be compromised. The Committee has also sought an in-depth explanation for poor performance identified in the vital signs report and demonstrated by ombudsman complaints. It has made clear recommendations on following up progress and helping to shape the future direction of service improvement.

The Committee also spent some time discussing the draft work programme for 2007/8 to ensure that the Select Committee is able to build on its sound progress. Key areas of work in the year ahead will encompass the committee's role in monitoring financial management including procurement, the letting of contracts and property and asset acquisition. There is an expectation that within the year the committee will receive reports with better integration of performance and finance information as they consider value for money. Upcoming performance issues that will be addressed are the performance of the Primary Care Trust against some Local Area Agreement targets, and in-depth monitoring of the waste contract performance. The committee is currently considering future task group activity.

### **2006 - 2007 Membership**

Councillor Anthony Dunn (Chair)  
Councillor John Detre (Vice Chair)  
Councillor Daniel Bessong  
Councillor Muhammad Butt  
Councillor Lesley Jones  
Councillor Alan Mendoza  
Councillor Robin Pagnamenta



### **Forward Plan Select Committee 2006/7**

Following the introduction of the new Overview and Scrutiny structure, the Forward Plan Select Committee held its first meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2006. The remit of the Select Committee includes monitoring the Forward Plan in advance of the presentation of any reports to the Executive, as well as scrutinising the decisions made by the Executive and subjecting those decisions to the call-In process when appropriate. Any decisions to be considered by the Executive fall within the remit of the Select Committee, with the exception of children and young people's issues, which are referred to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

During the review of the Overview and Scrutiny structure the council made the decision to lower the Call-In threshold to any five members of the council. The call-In procedure has been used a number of times during the year to allow the Select Committee the opportunity to further scrutinise decisions made by the Executive and to refer additional recommendations back to the Executive for consideration. At the September meeting, the Select Committee called-In two Executive decisions which included *Promoting Day Opportunities for Adults with Disabilities* and the *Revenue Budget 2006-07 Monitoring Report*. Members received further information from officers, questioned the Lead Members regarding these decisions and made several recommendations back to the Executive.

At the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2006, the Select Committee used the call-In process to subject the decision of the Executive concerning the *Review of Residents' Parking Permits* to further scrutiny. Members questioned the lead officer and Lead Member, who attended the meeting and extensively discussed the possibilities regarding charging higher fees for less environmentally friendly vehicles. Following this discussion, the Select Committee chose not to make any further recommendations to the Executive.

There was detailed scrutiny of two further reports at the meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2007: the *Future of Customer Contact* and the *Authority to Invite Tenders for Meals Service Contract*. After consideration of the first report the Select Committee made a number of recommendations to the Executive which included the requests that any changes to the One Stop Shop operations be made over a longer time period, that further consultation be carried out, that the Welfare Benefits Take Up service be continued and that the closure of the Kilburn and Kingsbury One Stop Shops and the Kilburn Library be re-considered. These recommendations were reported back to the Executive at the meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2007, where the Executive agreed to fully consult residents and customers on the new arrangements.

Having also considered the report concerning the Meals Service Contract at the February meeting and having received representations from members of the public on this item, the Select Committee again made a number of recommendations which were then reported to the March meeting of the Executive, along with a supplementary report which specifically addressed the concerns which had been raised by the members of the Select Committee.

Among the most recent items to be called-In during the last municipal year were the reports on the *Future Provision of Reassurance and Town Centre Warden Services* and the *Carlyon Print and Royal London Society Blind Options*. These reports were scrutinised by members of the Select Committee at its meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007 and the lead officers and Lead Members attended to answer questions in each case. The Select Committee was satisfied with the information it received and did not make any referrals back to the Executive.

It should be noted that whilst the Forward Plan Select Committee is not a decision-making body, it continues to make a positive contribution to the wider decision-making processes of the Council via the scrutiny process, as evidenced by the summary of the year's activities including its recommendations contributions to the Executive.

### **2006 - 2007 Membership**

Councillor Dave Coughlin (Chair)  
Councillor Chris Leaman (Vice Chair)  
Councillor Derek Jackson  
Councillor Janice Long  
Councillor Suresh Kansagra  
Councillor Atiq Malik  
Councillor Gavin Sneddon  
Councillor James Powney



## **Children & Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Children & Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee cover all issues relating to children's social care, youth provision, and education. There is a legal requirement to have co-opted members on a scrutiny committee where education issues are discussed. This gives a wide range of expertise and means this is the largest of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees with 14 members.

This has been a busy year for the committee as we have looked at many areas of the council's activities. We have received several overview reports which have enabled us to focus further on more detailed scrutiny. In particular we have prioritised those areas with young people who appear near the top of the pyramid of needs (see Brent Children and Young People's Plan, page 19,) who are the most vulnerable.

A task group has been investigating the worrying academic underperformance of certain ethnic minorities in schools mainly, but not exclusively, boys of Somali or African-Caribbean origins and this group will report shortly.

The committee has tackled the difficult and heated question of a new Academy particularly in the context of the alarming shortage of school places in Brent. The committee listened to all the issues and agreed firmly, despite reservations, with the proposed site in Wembley.

In the year 2006/7 the committee looked at the following issues:

### **Looked After Children in Brent**

The Committee were informed that there are approximately 400 looked after children in the borough cared for in a variety of provision including foster carers, children's homes and a small amount of out of borough placements. Having considered the issues, the Committee suggested that a value added approach be developed to assess the educational outcomes of looked after children and further information on plans to recruit new carers for looked after children be brought to a future Committee.

### **Special Educational Needs**

The Committee received an overview on the provision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Brent. Members were informed that one in five Brent residents was diagnosed with having SEN, although most of these needs were able to be met in school. A new pupil referral unit is being built and will help to ensure that more complex needs can be met locally. The Committee asked for further details of this unit to be brought to a future committee.

### **Children and Young Peoples Plan and Joint Area Review Action Plan**

The Children and Young Peoples Plan is a strategic document setting out the vision and priorities for the delivery of services to children and young people in Brent. The committee queried the performance management arrangements to ensure the delivery of the Plan and were satisfied that effective measures were in place. Members also asked

for further details on children's centres and preventative services to be brought to a future meeting.

An inspection of Brent Children's Services, known as the Joint Area Review (JAR) was carried out in December 2005. The outcomes of the inspection had been positive but highlighted some areas for improvement and as a result an action plan was developed. Members commended the work thus far and will consider various aspects of the plan during the course of the next municipal year.

#### **Youth service update**

The Committee considered a report on the youth service plan and were informed that a recent OFSTED inspection had graded the service as improving. The Committee commended officers on their work but also challenged the service to aim for a good spread of provision of services across the borough. A further report on this area will be brought back to a future meeting of the committee.

#### **Petition on youth service provision**

The Committee were asked to consider a petition brought by the residents of North Kilburn. They were particularly concerned about the lack of youth provision in the local area which could be contributing to the rising levels of anti-social behaviour amongst young people. During the discussions it became apparent that financial constraints on the council provided limited scope for new facilities, however there were a variety of options that could be explored including making use of a temporary facility. The committee agreed to support residents request for the youth service to play a role in co-ordinating services for young people in the area.

#### **Annual Education Standards Report**

The Committee was pleased to receive reports showing an improved performance across Brent schools. The Chair wrote to head teachers in all Primary and Secondary schools in Brent to commend them on their good work. The Committee also recommended that a greater priority be given to the teaching of science as statistics highlighted this as an area that needs more support. A Science Advisory Team was also recommended for Brent Schools.

#### **Children's Centres in Brent**

The Committee received a report on the first phase roll-out on Children's Centre's. Members were informed that the project had been impacted by the financial situation in the Primary Care Trust which would affect the next phase of the implementation.

#### **Kingsbury and Stonebridge Integrated Services Programme**

Integrated services is a project that tailors services, co-ordinated by a lead professional to help meet the needs of children and young people at risk of social exclusion. The Committee asked for a further report on this work to be brought back to a future meeting and the Chair will write to the Director of the PCT

#### **Extended services update**

The Extended Services project will provide a core offer of services to every school in the borough. The services will include childcare, parenting support, community access, swift and easy referral and a menu of activities. The committee welcomed this work and the benefits it will provide to the people of Brent. The committee will be monitoring the progress of this work and have asked for progress reports to be brought to future meeting of this committee.

#### **Impact of PCT Savings proposals for children and families in Brent**

The Committee considered the implications of the financial crisis within the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and how it would impact upon on services for children and families in Brent.

Officers from the PCT also attended this meeting to contribute to the discussion and answer questions. The Committee considered a report on savings that had already been implemented by the PCT as well as proposals for future savings. After a thorough discussion on the issues, it was agreed that the Chair, on behalf of the committee, would write to the PCT to express concern about potential cuts in physiotherapy, speech and language services.

### **School Places**

A special meeting was held under the call-in procedure to consider the location for a new school in the borough. After receiving reports and debating the issues the committee agreed, by majority vote, to recommend to the Executive that the new school be built on the Wembley Park Site.

### **2006 - 2007 Membership**

Councillor Will Motley (Chair)  
Councillor Mary Arnold (Vice Chair)  
Councillor Lena Ahmed  
Councillor Francis Eniola  
Councillor Uma Fernandes  
Councillor Mistry  
Councillor CJ Patel  
Councillor Jean Tullet

### **Voting Co-opted members:**

Rev Phil Stone  
Mrs Bondzi-Simpson  
Mr Lorenzato  
Ms Charles

### **Non-Voting Co-opted members:**

Dr Levison  
Mr Al-Khoei

## Member Training and Development

Training sessions held for members 2006/7		
Date	Type of training	Details
2nd November 2006.	Launch of Overview and Scrutiny	An event for Councillors to provide an introduction to the Overview and Scrutiny structures in Brent. The launch provided details on how the process worked in Brent and looked at the principles of good scrutiny, including good practice examples.
11 <sup>th</sup> October 2006	Budget Scrutiny Training	An external training event led by the Institute of Public Finance to give an overview of the key principles of budget scrutiny including the stages of financial scrutiny key documents that need to be scrutinised and the legal framework.
20 <sup>th</sup> October 2006	Improving local services the role of external scrutiny.	This event was hosted by the LB Hillingdon and looked at scrutinising the work of external partners. The conference featured case studies on LB Southwark scrutinising water services and the Greater London Assembly 7 <sup>th</sup> July review.
24/25th October 2006.	IDeA Leadership Academy Programme	Training event for scrutiny chairs hosted by the Improvement and Development Agency looking at the principles of political leadership, focussing on the skills that are needed to lead in a local government setting
3rd-4th February 2007.	IDeA Leadership Academy Programme	Training event for scrutiny chairs hosted by the Improvement and Development Agency looking at the principles of political leadership, focussing on the skills that are needed to lead in a local government setting.



## How to get involved in Overview and Scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny task groups focus on the issues that are of concern to local people. If you want to suggest a suitable topic for Scrutiny please contact the team on the details below:

### By Post

Local Democracy Team  
Brent Town Hall  
Room 221  
Forty Lane  
Wembley  
HA9 9HD

Alternatively you can email us at:  
**[scrutiny@brent.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@brent.gov.uk)**

Further information about the work of Overview and Scrutiny including task group reviews can be found on our website at:

[www.brent.gov.uk/Democracy.nsf](http://www.brent.gov.uk/Democracy.nsf)