



# **Overview and Scrutiny**

## **Annual Report 2007 – 2008**

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**Foreword by Councillor Lesley Jones, Chair,  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**



This is the second year of operation for the new overview and scrutiny structure. It is clear that work has taken place over that last 12 months to develop and improve the function. The overview and scrutiny committees continue to strive to improve services and work in an innovative and inclusive manner. The diversity of subjects considered demonstrates that the overview and scrutiny function is getting involved in most service areas and is starting to make headway with scrutiny of partners and external organisations.

As well as being a very busy and productive year for overview and scrutiny at Brent, it was also a sad year. In July 2007 Councillor Dorman Long passed away. Dorman was Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from May 2006 and was a strong advocate of effective scrutiny in the Borough. He had been a councillor for 34 years and was held in high regard by councillors of all parties and by officers.

The overview and scrutiny function was reviewed and re-launched in May 2006. Councillors and officers are now used to the revised structure. This is clear from the work of the committees as they have become more confident in their role. The Budget Panel has built on its achievements from last year and made further recommendations relating to the financial health of the council. Committees are beginning to appreciate the benefit of working in partnership and are now more willing to refer items and recommendations to each other. The range of task groups established and completed shows that members are prepared to investigate a wide range of issues and come up with innovative recommendations for improvement.

We have continued to work to raise the profile of overview and scrutiny in Brent, encouraging greater input from our diverse community, developing varied work programmes and initiating task groups targeted at prevalent issues of concern. We have issued 4 editions of the overview and scrutiny newsletter "*Spotlight*", which keeps members and the public up to speed on current work and developments, encouraging input and suggestions for future topics for overview and scrutiny via the council website.

There are a number of challenges that overview and scrutiny face in the coming 12 months. We need to be better at tracking recommendations. Committees could still work together more effectively. The council as a whole, and overview and scrutiny in particular, has to respond to the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Overview and scrutiny needs to work at its relationship with the council's Executive. It is important that each overview and scrutiny committee is well attended by the

members of the committee or by their alternate. We also need to respond to the training and development needs of councillors.

Individual committees have their own challenges that they need to respond to. The Health Select Committee needs to understand the implications of Healthcare for London now that the PCT's in London have agreed how they intend to take forward Lord Darzi's vision for health services in the capital. The Performance and Finance Select Committee have to become more effective at scrutinising the work of partners delivering targets within the Brent Local Area Agreement. That said, despite these challenges, I am very optimistic that 2008/09 will see further improvement in the overview and scrutiny function at Brent.

## **Section 1- What is Overview and Scrutiny?**

Overview and scrutiny is a process independent of the council's decision-making Executive which was established in the Local Government Act 2000. It allows councillors 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 and scrutiny is usually carried out by committees or smaller task groups.

Overview and scrutiny can provide a constructive challenge to the Executive, allowing members of all political groups to investigate issues from a non-political view point. Effective overview and scrutiny should be evidence based and engage non-executive (frontline) councillors and community representatives in the council's decision-making process.

Overview and scrutiny is a councillor 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 overview and scrutiny committees and champion issues through structured work programmes. Councillors chair committees, setting their agenda, steering in-depth investigations, and endorsing recommendations for consideration by the Executive. Overview and scrutiny has built up a reputation as a credible and influential source of advice, analysis, and initiates future policy options.

Overview and 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 and social care, community safety, and children and families where co-opted members are appointed to consider education matters.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has outlined four principles of good scrutiny. They are:

1. Good scrutiny should provide 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers.
2. It should reflect the voice and concerns of the public and its communities.
3. It should be carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny process.

4. Scrutiny should drive improvement in public services.

In Brent we try to ensure that all of our overview and scrutiny committees follow the four principles of good scrutiny.

## **Section 2 - Links to the Brent Corporate Strategy**

Brent Council has set out its priorities and ambitions in its Corporate Strategy 2006 - 2010. The overview and scrutiny committees monitor and challenge how the vision outlined in the Corporate Strategy will be implemented by ensuring that work programmes focus on key aspects of the strategy and targets and objectives are being met. By providing this focus scrutiny becomes relevant to local people and plays a significant role in engaging with the local community, helps the council to make better decisions, and enhances the efficiency of the organisation.

The purpose of this section of the report is to provide examples from each committee of how this has been achieved during 2007/8.

### **A great place**

*Clean and Green* – The Performance and Finance Select Committee regularly scrutinised the performance of the council's waste collection contract to ensure recycling and street cleansing targets were being achieved.

*Safe* – The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered youth offending in Brent and as a result set up a task group to consider the safety of children as they travel to and from school. The committee will also be looking at the work being done to prevent homophobic bullying in schools in Brent.

*Lively* – The Tourism task group prepared a report that considered how to attract and retain visitors to Brent, marketing the borough nationally and internationally.

### **A borough of opportunity**

*Local employment and enterprise* – The Town Centre Regeneration task group completed its review of the council's approach to town centre regeneration and made recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which will be passed on to the council's Executive.

*Health and well being* - Health and well-being is a key focus of the work of the Health Select Committee. The Committee has reviewed the plans and performance of the local NHS trusts. A task group, looking at increasing participation in sport through sports clubs is also currently finalising its report.

*Help when you need it* – The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee has taken an active interest in the education outcomes of some of Brent's most disadvantaged children, setting up an educational achievement task group and looking at language support for parents and pupils of Somali heritage.

## **One community**

*Settled homes* - The Overview and Scrutiny Committee spent time considering proposals for licensing houses in multiple occupation, to improve housing conditions and safety for people living in rented accommodation in Brent.

*Early excellence* – The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up a task group to consider providing additional support for young people who had below average levels of educational attainment and higher levels of school exclusions and youth offending. African Caribbean and Somali boys were found to be the most affected groups. The task group made a number of recommendations about this issue, which were reported to the council's Executive in September 2007.

*Community engagement* - 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 Health Select Committee continues to take the lead in scrutinising performance of health organisations in Brent. This helps to improve the accountability of these organisations to people in the borough.

*Building Capacity* – The Budget Panel continued its work, scrutinising the council's budget and the way that it is set, making recommendations for change and improvement. This helps members focus on the budget setting process and gives officers additional capacity in their budget setting work.



## Section 3 - Committee Achievements in 2007/08

### Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair – Councillor Lesley Jones



The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a wide ranging remit that includes all council services (except those in relation to Children and Families), scrutinising partners, the Local Strategic Partnership and the Local Area Agreement, scrutinising the implementation of the corporate strategy and post decision scrutiny. The committee also co-ordinates the work of the Budget Panel, the Health Select Committee, the Performance and Finance Select Committee and the Forward Plan Select Committee.

The members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were:

Councillor Lesley Jones (Chair)	Councillor Chris Leaman
Councillor Alec Castle (Vice Chair)	Councillor Ruth Moher
Councillor John Detre	Councillor Gavin Sneddon
Councillor Robert Dunwell	Councillor Bobby Thomas

The committee met 7 times in 2007/08, although the business of one of these meetings was deferred due to the death of the previous Chair of the Committee, Councillor Dorman Long. As a result of this, the Committee's work programme had to be reorganised. The committee established and completed a number of task groups during 2007/08 (see section 4 of this report). The committee also took evidence from a variety of external organisations, such as the Metropolitan Police, the Post Office, Postwatch and Brent PCT.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee spent time scrutinising a variety of issues in 2007/08 including:

#### **1. Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation**

The Private Sector Housing Service User Consultative Forum asked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider two issues in relation to licensing houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) – why Brent Council had not issued any new HMO licenses since they were given the powers to do so in the Housing Act 2004, and whether the council intended to introduce discretionary licensing for HMOs not covered by the mandatory licensing scheme?

The committee discovered that since powers to license HMOs had been available to councils (from April 2006), Brent Council had issued 44 mandatory licenses and planned to issue 100 in total during 2007/08.

However, because of the cost of introducing a discretionary scheme, there were no plans to introduce one unless funding was made available. The committee also investigated why the fee set for a HMO license does not cover the cost of issuing the license. The committee heard that fees were set at a level so as not to deter landlords from coming forward to register their property. In the light of the work of the Committee, it was agreed to review the operation of the HMO licensing scheme and the financial implications associated with it.

The review was reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2008. The committee still has concerns that large numbers of HMOs would be excluded from the mandatory licensing regime because they did not meet the criteria for licensing. As a result, the committee wanted to know how many HMOs there were in each ward in Brent that don't have to be licensed. This will be reported to the committee later in 2008 and may provide the evidence needed to grant additional funds for a discretionary licensing scheme.

## **2. Future of Customer Contact**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee spent time at its meeting in December 2007 scrutinising the council's plans on the future of customer contact.

The committee had wanted to ensure that members of the public would continue to be able to call customer contact points and still be able to speak to a member of staff, rather than switch to a completely automated phone system. The committee was concerned that the proposed changes to customer contact should not remove the possibility of face-to-face contact for members of the public.

Members believed that any changes to customer contact should not be driven by the need to make savings, but to improve customer service for people in Brent. As a result of the Committee's comments on the future of customer contact, it was agreed to review the changes made in the summer of 2008 to ensure that they were working as envisaged. This will be followed up by the committee in December 2008.

## **3. Older Peoples Health and Wellbeing Strategy**

The Older Peoples Health and Wellbeing Strategy proposed a shift in emphasis for working with older people, to move from a service which responded to critical need to one which focussed on preventative measures to enhance the wellbeing of people aged 50 and over. The committee had a number of concerns about this strategy, specifically:

- there were no costs in the strategy action plan and no indication of how the improvements would be delivered
- there were no targets against which to measure future success
- somebody should have overall responsibility for the strategy to ensure that it is embedded in services and delivered.

As a result of members concerns, the committee recommended that the Director of Housing and Community Care revise the strategy before putting it to the council's Executive. This is a good example of where a scrutiny committee can influence the shape and direction of a council strategy prior to its implementation.

#### **4. Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act**

The committee will take the lead in ensuring the council's scrutiny function is fully prepared to implement the major changes to overview and scrutiny included in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act.

The main issues of interest to the committee were the introduction of greater powers to scrutinise partnerships and partners, the right to a response to recommendations from the council's Executive and the introduction of councillor calls for action. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussed how it would approach the new powers available to the function and will agree proposals for the council's Executive early in 2008/09. This is one of the main areas for development for the overview and scrutiny function as a whole for the coming year.

#### **5. Local Area Agreement**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee spent time looking at the evidence base for the Local Area Agreement targets. This was part of a wider consultation with members on the Local Area Agreement. As well as developing targets with partners, it is important that members are given the opportunity to influence one of the council's key documents for the next 3 years. Scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee brought extra rigor to the LAA process.

#### **6. Brent Multi Agency Adult Protection Annual Report**

The Brent Multi-Agency Adult Protection Committee presented their annual report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2008. The committee was concerned that other partners on the Multi Agency Protection Committee had not supplied information for the report. It was also reported to councillors that some partners did not regularly attend meetings of the Multi-Agency Protection Committee, particularly Brent PCT. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee stressed the importance to agency partners that they needed to engage with this issue.

The committee was disappointed to learn that the service had no pooled budget or ongoing funding for training. The committee recommended that funding was sought from the Brent Performance Fund whilst other sources of funding should be actively pursued. The committee agreed with officers that details of the costs of the services would be included in the next annual report. Members also expressed concern about the impact of the direct

payment scheme and the need to monitor clients' well-being and safety if they buy-in services from private care providers.

## **7. Task Groups**

In 2007/08, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up and monitored the progress of the following task groups:

- Voluntary sector funding
- Increasing participation in sport through sports clubs
- Tourism in Brent
- Town centre regeneration
- Climate change
- Post Office closures.

The committee also agreed the scope for the following task groups:

- Transitional services for 18-25 year olds
- Bus routes to health sites (joint with Health Select Committee)
- Community use of council owned buildings.

**Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
**Chair – Councillor Will Motley**



The Children and 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.

The members of the Committee were:

**Councillors:**

Councillor Will Motley (Chair)  
Councillor Mary Arnold (Vice Chair)  
Councillor Lena Ahmed  
Councillor Francis Eniola  
Councillor Mrs Uma Fernandes  
Councillor Kanta Mistry  
Councillor Chandubhai Patel  
Councillor Jean Tullett

**Voting Co-optees:**

Rev Phil Stone  
Mrs Bondzi-Simpson  
Mr Lorenzato  
Mr Akisanya

**Non-Voting Co-optees:**

Dr Levison  
Mr Al-Khoei

The committee met 6 times in 2007/08. It scrutinised a number of key issues including:

**1. School Places**

The provision of school places in Brent has become a serious issue as a result of inward migration to the Borough. There is a shortage of reception, primary and secondary places across the borough. Some children have been placed in schools outside the Borough, while short term measures such as the building of a portakabin at Wembley Primary School, were also employed to deal with the problem. Members were interested in the long term solutions that would be used to resolve this issue and followed up the item a number of times during the year.

The committee pressed the Director of Children and Families on how the extra primary and secondary school places will be funded, and whether funding for extra buildings would be in place soon enough to deal with the problems faced by schools. The committee was told that demand for school places was currently greater in the north of the Borough because of parental

preference for schools in the north. The greatest demand for places is in the Wembley area.

This is likely to be an ongoing issue in Brent and one that the committee will continue to monitor throughout 2008/09.

## **2. Impact of PCT savings proposals for children and families in Brent**

Members were concerned that physiotherapy services were to be reduced at Hay Lane School and also at Grove Park School in order for Brent PCT to meet its savings targets. As well as having an impact on the health and wellbeing of the children at the schools, the committee was concerned that the cuts would have an impact on teaching provision. The teachers at Hay Lane School had prepared a report for the committee to consider on this issue.

After discussing the initial report prepared by teachers at Hay Lane School, the PCT agreed to supply information on their Health and Equality Impact Assessments that were used to inform their savings proposals. Whilst the committee did not endorse the savings, they were concerned that organisations in Brent should be accountable for their actions. Following discussions on this issue at the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee the teachers and PCT came to a new agreement about how physiotherapy services should be provided.

## **3. English Language support for Somali Pupils and support for parents of disadvantaged pupils**

Members were concerned that pupils from certain ethnic groups were underachieving at school. Indeed, a task group that looked into educational achievement amongst Black African and African Caribbean boys reported its findings in July 2007.

The committee also considered the support given to pupils who don't have English as a first language. Some groups of pupils who don't have English as a first language (such as those from the Asian Indian ethnic group) don't have significant educational issues, whereas others, such as Somali pupils present more challenges. By the end of key stage 4, 30% of pupils of Somali heritage achieve 5 A\*-C grade GCSE's.

The committee heard about the work that was being done by schools, the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service and voluntary groups, such as the Help Somalia Foundation, to improve educational attainment. The committee was told that many parents were not even aware of the underachievement of their children. Members were also told of solutions in place to help support this community. These included establishing after school clubs and helping parents to understand the education system possibly through the extended schools initiative. The Committee welcomed these initiatives and called for greater help to be given to parents to support their children.

#### **4. Exclusions from Brent Schools**

The work of the improving outcomes task group prompted the committee to consider exclusions in Brent and the provision in place to support pupils who are not in school. The chair visited a local pupil referral unit and found that the service delivers a high standard to vulnerable pupils.

The committee considered the issue of school exclusions in June 2007 and found that they had increased steadily over the last ten years but that this was in line with national trends. The service reported that there is some difficulty in finding alternative education services for excluded young people and the forthcoming 14-19 curriculum would be a way of meeting their needs.

#### **5. The 14-19 Agenda**

The committee looked at the 14-19 agenda in February and June 2008. The introduction of the new 14-19 vocational diplomas are an important qualification for those young people who were more suited to a practical rather than an academic course of study. Members were pleased with the service department's progress in preparing for the new diplomas.

#### **6. Integrated Services**

The committee were interested in the important role that the integrated services pilot would have in identifying areas of concern among young people. Integrated Services is a multi agency approach to identifying young people who may have additional needs and providing a package of support with the young person only having to deal with one professional. The committee were pleased to find that the pilot has been successful and the initiative will be rolled out across the borough as resources allow. Members felt that if young people receive the right support at an early stage it would help to stem the escalation of problems that often lead to school exclusions and youth offending.

#### **7. Youth Service Provision**

Members wanted to ensure that there is a good spread of youth activities and the committee specifically requested a map of provision across Brent. After questioning officers about provision of services for people with mental health problems, financial issues affecting the youth service and sponsoring from local businesses, members were satisfied with the service provided and congratulated the department on the production of a leaflet for young people detailing youth services in Brent.

#### **8. Task Groups**

In 2007/08, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up and monitored the following task groups:

- Improving education outcomes for Black African and African Caribbean pupils
- Healthy relationships
- Safety at the school gates.



**Budget Panel**  
**Chair – Councillor Alan Mendoza**



This was the second year of operation for the Budget Panel and members were able to build on the experience and lessons learned from 2006/07. The role of the Budget Panel is to challenge and assist the Executive in the budget making process. The panel provides a helpful sounding board for the challenges posed to council departments and encourages officers to meet the needs of service delivery whilst also making efficiency savings.

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.

The principle aim of the budget panel was to ensure the council agreed a robust and realistic budget.

The members of the Budget Panel were:

Councillor Alan Mendoza (Chair)  
Councillor Valerie Brown  
Councillor Mark Cummins

Councillor Pawan Gupta  
Councillor Ann John  
Councillor Jim Moher

The Budget Panel met 8 times between July 2007 and February 2008 and received presentations and evidence from across the council. The following councillors and officers attended the budget panel to give presentations or answer questions:

Executive Members: Councillors Lorber and Blackman

Martin Cheeseman – Director of Housing and Community Care  
John Christie – Director of Children and Families  
Michael Read – Assistant Director Policy and Regulation, Environment and Culture  
Phil Newby – Director Policy and Regeneration  
Toni McConville - Director Communications and Consultation  
Val Jones – Director Human Resources and Diversity  
Terry Osborne - Borough Solicitor  
Cathy Tyson – Assistant Director Policy, Policy and Regeneration  
Irfan Malik – Assistant Director of Streetcare and Transportation

Keith Balmer – Director of Streetcare  
Dave Carroll – Head of Policy and Projects, Planning Service  
Zayd Al -Jawad – Section 106 Officer

The Budget Panel produced 3 reports during the course of its work:

- The First Interim Report prior to the draft budget being published
- The Second Interim Report, which built on the first report and included recommendations on the draft budget prior to its agreement by the Executive
- The Final Report, which built on the second report and included recommendations on the Executive's budget prior to it being debated at Full Council, the budget process and the budget scrutiny process.

The recommendations made in the Panel's final report fell into three major areas: generic recommendations reiterated from 2007/08, requests for further action on recommendations carried forward from 2007/08, and specific and thematic short and medium term recommendations for the council to work towards.

The Executive responded positively to all of the Panel's 21 recommendations made in the First Interim report and these have either been built into the 2008/09 budget or they will be implemented in 2008/09. In addition, the Panel made a further 7 recommendations following the publication of the draft budget which will be considered in 2008/09. They were:

1. That fees and charges should be included in the Panel's work programme for 2008/09, including a presentation on how the council is going to develop a more focussed approach to maximising opportunities in the area of advertising and sponsorship. Work should be undertaken to look at the ways in which other local authorities successfully achieve this.
2. That as the Budget Panel views Adult Social Care as a high risk area in terms of potential overspend and the council's ability to implement the transformation programme to extract saving, the Adult Social Care budget should be closely monitored and remedial action taken as soon as necessary.
3. That, in light of the wider issues that will arise from both implementation of the review of day care and adult care transformational, and potential implications for the budget if they cannot be implemented, these reviews are referred to another panel of the council for consideration.
4. That there is greater transparency in relation to the implementation of the new Local Area Agreement and how and where the Area Based Grant is being spent. The Budget Panel should include this in its work programme for 2008/9

5. That the Budget Panel thanks the Executive for their feedback on the recommendations made in the first interim report. The Budget Panel would like to receive regular feedback on progress particularly on those recommendations that have not been implemented to date.

6. That given the continued deferment of priority growth, the Executive should provide information about progress made on delivering the Corporate Strategy priorities.

7. That the council should consult with other local authorities, who have made zero increases or reductions in council tax but have still delivered quality services to their local communities, to identify areas of good practice.

The Budget Panel will take steps to follow up these recommendations at its first meeting in 2008/09 to ensure that progress is made to implement these.

The Budget Panel also highlighted two particular areas of concern. The first of these is the uncertain effect that uncounted population growth is having on Brent's budget making process. The Panel is aware that there is a dispute in the method of counting Brent's population between central and local government and hope that this can be resolved as soon as possible. Uncounted population growth does of course impact on the Budget both immediately and in the medium term through underfunding of Brent's grant allocation. It is unfair for the council to be shouldering the cost of providing the necessary services for residents when the means to do so is being denied to us.

Secondly, the Panel is aware that financial circumstances have been constrained in the past two years and that this situation is expected to continue for the remainder of this administration's term in office. In the light of the continued deferment of priority growth that this has entailed, the Panel urge the Executive to consider carefully the need to deliver the Corporate Strategy priorities over the next two years. The Budget Panel will be working in 2008/09 to try and assist the council to address these two key issues.

Finally, the Budget Panel made a number of recommendations to other overview and scrutiny committees. All of these have been picked up in the work programmes for 2008/09. For example, the Panel recommended that there should be greater member involvement in the Local Area Agreement. This was agreed and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will take this forward with officers working on the LAA.

**Performance and Finance Select  
Committee  
Chair – Councillor Anthony Dunn**



In 2007/08 the Performance and Finance Select Committee has continued to challenge performance across a wide spectrum of council activities and services focusing on both better value for money and service improvement. “Exception reporting” has enabled the Select Committee to consider performance weaknesses in a number of areas.

The members of the committee in 2007/08 were:

Councillor Anthony Dunn (Chair)	Councillor Lesley Jones
Councillor John Detre (Vice Chair)	Councillor Alan Mendoza
Councillor Daniel Bessong	Councillor James Moher
Councillor Muhammed Butt	Councillor Rob Pagnamenta

The main issues considered by the committee in 2007/08 were:

**1. Effects of Primary Care Trust Turnaround Plan on the Local Area Agreement**

Health matters would usually fall within the remit of the Health Select Committee. However, Performance and Finance Select Committee have the overall performance monitoring role within overview and scrutiny in Brent. This includes scrutiny of external organisations, such as the PCT. The Performance and Finance Select Committee picked up this issue at the request of the PCT Turnaround task group.

The committee was concerned about the impact of the Brent PCT budget reductions on services in the Borough, particularly those jointly agreed within the Local Area Agreement (LAA). If the LAA targets were not met then the associated performance reward grant from central government would be withheld. In June 2007 the committee spent time looking at the impact of budget cuts on the teenage pregnancy rate and smoking cessation, both Local Area Agreement Targets.

The committee were clear that they did not want to see services suffer as a result of the cuts to service proposed by the PCT. Officers from the PCT attended the committee meeting in June to explain that although the savings had to be made, services would be reorganised to ensure that targets for smoking cessation would be met. Commitments weren't made on targets for rates of teenage pregnancy.

## **2. Challenging Performance – Revenues and Benefits and Waste Collection**

One of the key roles for the Performance and Finance Select Committee is to challenge the performance of key service areas. Two areas selected for regular scrutiny in 2007/08 were revenues and benefits and services under the waste contract. Both of these areas are high profile, front line services with constant interaction with members of the public.

The committee considered reports on the performance of the revenues and benefits service 4 times in 2007/08. The committee was interested in both benefits administration, carried out “in house”, by Brent Council and also in Council Tax collection, carried out by a third party, Capita. Performance against most targets for revenues and benefits was achieved in 2007/08. The exception to this was the level of council tax arrears collected. Although collection of arrears increased, it fell short of the target set. Performance and Finance Select Committee will continue to monitor this in 2008/09.

The council contracts its domestic waste and recycling collection and street cleansing services to Veolia who have run the contract since April 2007. Regular performance reports are presented to the Performance and Finance Select Committee. Officers from the council and also from Veolia were called to the committee on two occasions to answer members’ questions on the performance of the contract. The committee believes that it is important the organisations delivering services on behalf of the council should also be held to account by members.

The committee will continue to monitor this contract into 2008/09. In particular, they are keen that some of their recommendations, such as installing cameras in fly tipping hotspots, are implemented this year.

## **3. Quarterly Performance Reports**

The committee receives quarterly performance and finance review reports. These reports are used to highlight good and poor performance and form the basis of much of the work that the committee does.

The committee has influenced and improved the way that these reports are put together. The reports now bring together performance information across council services, financial information and an analysis of risk relating to the critical performance indicators. This gives members an opportunity to focus on the areas of highest concern.

Drawing together both performance and finance information has strengthened the link between the corporate strategy and the medium term financial strategy. It has allowed the committee to consider the relationship between spending, performance and activity. For example, the impact of rises in the number of children in different forms of care on the children’s service provision and budget.

#### **4. Progress on CPA Score and Preparation for Comprehensive Area Assessment**

Members were interested in the council's updated CPA score during 2007/08. The council is rated as a 3 star authority that is improving well. The main area of weakness identified in the assessment was the culture block. Satisfaction amongst residents was particularly poor for museums and art galleries. The council was assessed on these despite being an outer London Borough.

The committee questioned officers on the steps that were being taken to improve the score in this area, acknowledging that services such as libraries also had a part to play in improving the cultural experience for people in Brent. The committee will also take a leading role in ensuring the council is prepared for Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). Its main responsibilities in 2008/09 will be to:

- challenge under performance
- challenge value for money
- focus on how objectives will be met as opposed to what needs to be achieved
- highlight the risks in not achieving these ambitions; and
- ensure focus on what really matters to residents.

**Health Select Committee**  
**Chair – Councillor Chris Leaman**



The Health Select Committee has continued to build on the role established by its predecessor the Health Overview Panel, scrutinising the performance of local NHS Trusts, informing policy development within the council, and promoting well-being across the borough. Its focus in 2007/08 was on the Brent tPCT Turnaround Plan and on the implications of the Healthcare for London work, carried out by Lord Darzi.

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 and 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.

The members of the committee in 2007/08 were:

Councillor Chris Leaman (Chair)	Councillor John Detre
Councillor Eddie Baker	Councillor Derek Jackson
Councillor Alec Castle	Councillor Ruth Moher
Councillor George Crane	Councillor Colum Moloney

The Committee's main achievements in 2007/08 are set out below:

**1. Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC)**

A joint overview and scrutiny committee, made up of representatives of all 32 London Boroughs, plus representatives from the City of London, Essex and Surry County Councils was formed to scrutinise the "Healthcare for London: Consulting the Capital" consultation undertaken by the Joint Committee of

Primary Care Trusts (JCPCTs) between November 2007 and March 2008. Councillor Chris Leaman, chair of the Health Select Committee was a member of the JOSOC.

The committee met throughout the latter half of 2007 and early 2008 to discuss the consultation proposals. The outcome of the Committee's work has been brought together in a final report which was considered by the Joint Committee of Primary Care Trusts in May 2008. A formal response to the JOSOC will be given at a final meeting in October 2008.

This committee represents a real step forward for scrutiny in London. It is the first time that all the Boroughs have worked together on one project. The Healthcare for London proposals and their implementation in Brent is also likely to be one of the main areas of interest for the Health Select Committee in 2008/09.

## **2. Brent Birthing Centre**

The committee considered the future of the Brent Birthing Centre over a number of meetings in 2007/08. The Centre was a midwifery led facility at Central Middlesex Hospital that was to be closed, mainly due to a lack of use. The occupancy rate at the time the committee first looked at this issue was 16%. The PCT wanted to move all impatient maternity care to the maternity unit at Northwick Park hospital.

The committee looked at the options for the Birthing Centre and the consultation exercise carried out on the proposals to ensure that all stakeholders had an opportunity to put forward their views. The committee endorsed the consultation as being fair and thorough. The committee also responded formally to the consultation, supporting the North West London Hospital Trusts Preferred option to move the Brent Birthing Centre to Northwick Park Hospital and move antenatal care from Brent Birthing Centre to Central Middlesex Hospital. Despite agreeing with the Trust's preferred option, the committee thoroughly scrutinised all the options and felt that the Trust's preferred option would have the best outcomes for people in Brent.

## **3. Healthcare Commission Annual Health Check**

The Health Select Committee has a duty to comment on the Healthcare Commission Annual Health Check self assessments made by each of the NHS trusts in the Brent area. The committee scrutinised the assessments for the Brent tPCT, the North West London Hospitals NHS Trust and Central and North West London (CNWL) Foundation Trust at its meeting in April 2008.

Before considering the assessments, the committee took advice and guidance from the Healthcare Commission to maximise the benefit of the exercise. Although the assessments are quite technical in places, the committee was able to comment on the 3 assessments and passed comments to the Healthcare Commission. The committee will receive feedback from the Trusts in early 2008/09 on the Healthcare Commissions response.



#### **4. Brent tPCT Turnaround Plan**

The committee has followed the progress of Brent tPCT as it implemented its turnaround plan since its financial difficulties came to light. The committee is pleased that the tPCT is now officially out of turnaround. This was confirmed in April 2008, when the committee considered the Taylor report, which looked at the management and governance failures at the organisation, which led to a £25m budget deficit for 2006/07.

The relationship between the committee and the new management at the tPCT is good and working relationships will be further developed in 2008/09. Consideration of the Taylor report was important for the committee as a way of bringing together the different strands of activity that had been taking place following the implementation of the turnaround plan.

#### **5. Public Health Annual Report**

The committee considered the Brent PCT annual report in July 2007. This gave members an early opportunity not only to ask questions of the report, but also to suggest issues for inclusion in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which will be on the Health Select Committee agenda in July 2008.

The Health Select Committee suggested that the Health and Wellbeing Strategy needed a greater focus on preventative health, particularly in areas such as diabetes. Members also felt that health information should be translated into language easily understood by the public – plain English and also translations into languages spoken in Brent. The committee will follow this up in July 2008.

#### **6. Updates from the Brent PCT Patient and Public Involvement Forum**

The Brent PCT Patient and Public Involvement Forum had a standing item on each Health Select Committee agenda to update the committee on its work. Members felt it was important that good working relationships were maintained with the PPIF and this has continued since PPIFs were abolished in April 2008 (to be replaced by LINKs).

In 2007/08, the main issues that the PPIF brought to the Health Select Committee related to the transition to LINKs and the Healthcare Commission Annual Health Check. The PPIF also presented its annual report to the Committee.

#### **7. Brent PCT's Consultation on Healthcare for London**

The committee spent time looking at the consultation on Healthcare for London, run in Brent by Brent PCT. The consultation was concerned with the overall framework for health services in London, and was not specific to Brent. Members were interested in the strategic proposals, such as the development of polyclinics.

The Committee's main concerns related to the development of polyclinics, which if sited in one building could mean that people have to travel further to see their GP. The committee also felt that Healthcare for London hadn't taken on board the complexity of making widespread changes to health services in a borough as diverse as Brent. The PCT accepted that this latter point was an issue for Brent that would have to be addressed. It is quite likely that during 2008/09, specific proposals on implementing Healthcare for London will come forward that will have a real impact on services in Brent. The Health Select Committee will take an active interest in proposals, as they are developed.

### **8. Acton Lane Surgery**

The Health Select Committee received a deputation from the Patient Forum at Acton Lane Surgery following a change in GP arrangements at the surgery. The GPs at the surgery had terminated their contract with the PCT and this had left many patients disappointed. The committee considered this issue and the PCT's response in these unusual circumstances, where one partner had decided to dissolve the partnership.

The committee was satisfied that the PCT had handled the matter appropriately, but asked that the PCT respond formally to a petition handed to them by the Acton Lane Patient Forum. In addition, the Chair of the Health Select Committee agreed to write to the Action Lane Patient Forum to outline the reasons why the committee believed that the PCT had responded appropriately.

**Forward Plan Select Committee  
Chair – Councillor David Coughlin**



The remit of the Forward Plan 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.

The members of the Forward Plan Select Committee in 2007/08 were:

Councillor David Coughlin (Chair)	Councillor Janice Long
Councillor Alec Castle	Councillor James Powney
Councillor Valerie Brown	Councillor John Detre
Councillor Chris Leaman (Vice Chair)	Councillor Atiq Malik

2007/08 has been a productive year for the Forward Plan Select Committee and members hope to build on this in 2008/09. The committee has made numerous recommendations and suggestions to the council's Executive, supported by all members, regardless of party group. This is in keeping with the principle of good scrutiny, that it shouldn't be party political.

One issue that has been a source of frustration to the committee is that Executive members are not always available to answer questions on their proposals. It has been difficult to get to the root of some issues because the lead member has not been present to explain the administration's purpose in proposing some recommendations. This is something the committee will need to address with members of the Executive.

The Committee's main areas of work in 2007/08 included the following:

**1. Call In**

In 2007/08 the Forward Plan Select Committee called in 7 reports, which after discussions, decided not to send back to the Executive for reconsideration. They were:

- 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
- South Kilburn New Deal for Communities Delivery Plan 2008 – 2010.

## **2. Cook on Route Meal Service**

The committee also called in the report on the authority to award the contract for a Cook on Route Meals Service. The committee had serious concerns about the contract for the service and as a result recommended that the Executive agree to retain the current service whilst the successful contractor for the new service was independently quality checked. The Executive did not agree with the Forward Plan Select Committee's recommendation and agreed to uphold their original decision. The matter was eventually called in to Full Council, which decided to endorse the Executive's original decision. Through the use of the call in procedure, the decision to let the contract was subject to thorough scrutiny.

## **3. Proposal for a Borough Wide Controlled Drinking Zone**

The Forward Plan Select Committee had a number of concerns about the proposals for a borough wide Controlled Drinking Zone. Members didn't believe that the Zone was essential across all parts of the borough and they had concerns about the cost of its implementation. Displacement of street drinkers in particular had been an issue following the introduction of a CDZ in Kilburn and the committee did not want this to be repeated on a Borough wide level. The committee agreed to record its concerns that the proposed CDZ scheme appears under resourced and has been given insufficient consideration and pass its views to Full Council. Although Full Council debated the Committee's concerns and whether the plan to implement the CDZ should be deferred, in the end Council agreed to implement the CDZ.

## **4. South Kilburn New Deals for Communities – Review of Governance Arrangements**

The committee took an interest in the steps taken to improve the governance arrangements at the South Kilburn New Deal for Communities. There had been numerous issues related to the governance of the NDC which had ultimately resulted in a governance review in the early part of 2006 carried out by the Council's Audit and Investigation Team. The Committee considered the review findings.

The committee felt that Honoria payments to board members should not have been allowed to happen and that there had also been problems around employment issues. The committee was pleased that the SKNDC would be subject to more rigorous auditing, but decided to recommend that the Executive ask the SKNDC board to establish a standing audit committee to try and ensure that the governance issues that arose would not be allowed to happen again. The Executive noted this recommendation.

## **5. Clock Cottage**

The Forward Plan Select Committee was interested in the proposed sale of the Clock Cottage site. The council wanted to sell the site in Kenton and had received an offer from St Luke's Hospice, which it rejected on the grounds that it did not meet the council's valuation of the site and did not represent best value.

The committee was concerned that as well as considering the financial value of the site, other factors such as socio-economic and community benefits should be taken into account when a final decision was taken on the future of the site. As a result, the committee recommended this to the council's Executive.

## **Section 4 - Task Groups Completed in 2007/08**

### **Voluntary sector funding task group**

This task group was established to look into the issue of voluntary sector funding in Brent. The council's Main Programme Grant (MPG) fund provided just under £1million per year in grants to local voluntary agencies that deliver a number of important services in the borough that might not otherwise be available. It was felt that much of the funding was 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 to each organisation. Unfunded organisations and emerging communities found it extremely difficult to access council resources which has led to questions about equality, and whether the council is getting the best value it can for the money it spends.

The task group reported their findings to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in May 2007. The task group made 12 recommendations, all of which were accepted by the council's Executive, except for an increase in funding to the MPG to help the development of voluntary and community sector groups where there are emerging needs, communities and organisations. Extra resources have not been available to implement this.

The most significant recommendation was to develop an overarching Voluntary Sector Strategy that sets out what the council is trying to achieve in the way it works with and funds the voluntary and community sector to achieve more for local people. This strategy should be completed by the end of 2008. The council is also to hold its first annual conference with the voluntary and community sector in autumn 2008 with the aim of enhancing relationships and building trust.

This review provides an excellent example of how overview and scrutiny can positively contribute to communities and individuals in Brent, by highlighting the difficulties in voluntary sector funding and making recommendations to address them. The task group tackled this sensitive (and often political issue) and considered evidence from a range of sources to draw up recommendations that should help to develop and enhance voluntary sector organisations in Brent.

## **Improving outcomes for African and African Caribbean pupils**

In Brent, statistics over a number of years have shown that some young people experience below average outcomes across a range of measures including educational attainment, school exclusions and crime. African Caribbean and Somali boys are the most affected group.

In order to understand the issues and make recommendations for change the Improving Outcomes task group was established by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The aim of the task group was to consider how outcomes can be improved for underachieving young people and to embed good practice in service delivery.

The task group found that much good work was taking place across the borough to tackle this issue but there was need for more cross departmental working to avoid duplication and overlap. Councillors also recognised the valuable role of the voluntary and community organisations in meeting the needs of African Caribbean and African pupils and recommended that good projects need to be identified and this information shared.

The task group reported their findings to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2007 and then to the Executive in September 2007. The recommendations were welcomed by the Executive, which requested that the Children and Families Directorate report back by May 2008 outlining the measures have been taken to identify best practice and disseminate it to schools and social care staff.

A progress update was provided for the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2008. The key messages included:

- The relative decline in educational attainment from Key Stage 1 (7) to Key Stage 2 (11) for Black Caribbean, Black African, and, more specifically, Somali pupils has been largely eradicated; these pupils are now progressing on average at least as well as or better than Brent borough averages
- The percentage of Black Caribbean boys achieving 5 A\*-Cs at GCSE including English and Maths is 26% compared to the overall borough average of 50% of pupils. The figure is lower for Somali boys; only 13% achieving 5 A\*-Cs including English and Maths
- Black Caribbean children and young people are less over-represented on many inclusion and social indicators, such as teenage pregnancy, not in education, employment and training (NEET), on the child protection register and Children Looked After. In contrast, the numbers of Black African, African Caribbean, Black British and Somali boys/young men on the Youth Offending Register has risen from 2005/06 to 2006/07. In addition, Black Caribbean pupils are still significantly over-represented in pupil exclusion figures
- Additional resources / funding for Improving Outcomes continues to be problematic. Some progress has been made / has the potential to be

made but sustainable funding to embed additional resources identified by the original Scrutiny report is still to be identified.

This review has helped a specific section of Brent's population and identified a number of solutions that if implemented will assist in improving outcomes for African Caribbean and Black African school pupils. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee will continue to monitor progress on this work in 2008/09.



## Post Office closures

The Post Office closures task group was established in response to the proposals announced by the Post Office on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2008 to close 6 Post Office branches in Brent. The affected branches were:

- 67 Walm Lane, NW2 4QR, Mapesbury Ward
- 5 Court Parade, East Lane HA0 3HY, Northwick Park Ward
- 340-344 Stag Lane, NW9 9AG, Queensbury Ward
- Unit 4, Stonebridge Park Shopping Centre, NW10 8LB, Stonebridge Ward
- Wrights Place, St Raphael's Estate, NW10 0PX, Stonebridge Ward
- 1000 Harrow Road, NW10 5NT, Kensal Green Ward.

The task group carried out a wide consultation with local residents, organisations and ward councillors and used evidence from Mosaic, which gave up to date information on levels of deprivation in the borough, to review the closure proposals. Councillors were opposed to the closures because of the crucial role they play in maintaining the quality of life for many local residents, particularly older people, those on low incomes, single parent families and small businesses. In some areas, the local post office provides the only access many residents have to financial services.

The task group discovered that the information used to assess levels of deprivation in the borough was 4 years old. This was not the most up to date information available. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007 showed an increase in the levels of deprivation in the borough. All of the areas surrounding the post office facing closure have increased in deprivation since 2004 and these points were made to the Post Office in the task group report and also when representatives attended the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2008.

The task group made the following recommendations:

- In light of the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007, which highlights the increased deprivation across the borough, Post Office Limited should reconsider its proposals for Brent
- The Stonebridge Park post office branch remains open
- The Harrow Road post office remains open
- Improvements should be made to the post office service in Brent Park
- The Post Office should increase the number of counters in alternative post office sites
- The council should consider working in partnership with PostWatch to set up user groups to monitor local post office services
- The Post Office should provide further information on how decisions have been made, including the commercial case for closures.

Unfortunately the Post Office decided to close all 6 post offices in Brent. However, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will follow up the other recommendations to ensure that they are fully implemented.

## **Tourism in Brent**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked the Tourism Task Group to investigate the role that the council plays in providing tourism services the borough and consider how those services can be improved.

The London Borough of Brent can rightly be described as a prime area for tourism; it is home to the famous Wembley Stadium and has a vast array of restaurants and award winning parks. Wembley is undergoing a multi million pound regeneration programme which will transform the area over the next ten years. However the council does not have a dedicated tourism resource to manage the flow of visitors to the borough and this was a concern to the Committee.

The Tourism Task Group report was debated at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2007. The committee decided to make the following recommendations to the council's Executive:

- That the council either redefine an existing post, create a new position or use a "hands –on" consultant, alone or in combination, to co-ordinate tourism efforts across the council sectors and with commercial and private sectors, for an initial period of 6 months
- That officers from relevant departments across the council convene a tourism group to determine how the recommendations of the task group can be implemented
- That the council work with local businesses and partners to develop promotion material around themes, for example working with restaurants to develop a full range of marketing materials for "eating out within Brent"
- That a Brand and associated logo is developed for use by Brent services and all tourism related products and agencies with a recognised logo that can be included on other relevant stakeholder promotions.

The recommendations of the task group were considered by the council's Executive in December 2007. The Executive agreed to establish a tourism task group, led by Saida Ladha, Business Development Manager at the Brent Film Office. This group is due to report to the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will follow up the progress on this matter.

## **Town centre regeneration**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up this task group to investigate the council's approach to town centre regeneration and how this could be improved. The task group was especially interested in what could be done to stem the decline of town centres and what interventions would be useful for those at risk of failing. The task group met with relevant officers across the council to discuss activities that are taking place to regenerate town centres. Similar discussions were held with the West London Business Group.

At the end of their deliberations the task group concluded that there is good work already taking place across the borough. The task group developed a series of measures that would enhance this work.

The task group recommended:

- That the planning service develops a protocol to agree priorities and improve the response to environmental issues raised by town centre managers
- That the new town centre strategy in the council's Regeneration Action Plan for 2007-2009 is endorsed by the relevant portfolio holders and clear resources to deliver its objectives are identified through the budget process
- That neighbourhood working officers ensure that local businesses are included within their consultation
- That neighbourhood working officers with a town centre in their ward dedicate at least one walkabout a year to focus on town centre issues
- That the planning department research the possibilities of identifying suitable locations to trial a project on flexible uses of property on the periphery of high streets, where alternative uses would add to the attractiveness of the town centre
- That the Street Care department explore and report on how other councils overcome difficulties with enforcing fixed penalty fines for people who drop litter and suggest a model that might suit Brent
- That the Street Care, Food Safety and Environmental Health Teams report back on the scope for developing a performance indicator around ensuring that all local shops are compliant with waste management regulations
- That the transportation unit investigate the possibility for introducing more dual car parking bays close to town centres and where feasible and agreed in consultation with residents, enable paid short stay use by shoppers.

These recommendations were endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and will now be forwarded to the council's Executive for consideration. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will follow up the recommendations in 2008/09.

## **Section 5 - Ongoing Task Groups**

### **Healthy relationships**

This task group has been established to consider how parents and faith groups should be involved in talking to young people about sex and relationships. Meetings have been held with parents of teenage parents and faith groups to seek their views on what the council could do to facilitate discussions on this sensitive topic. The review is likely to finish in the autumn.

### **Increasing participation in sport through sports clubs**

This task group was set up to look at how participation in sport could be increased and how sports clubs could assist in this. Information has been extracted from Mosaic (a customer segmentation tool) that shows Brent's main population types, how likely they are to undertake physical exercise and what type of sports they are likely to be interested in. Data is also being gathered from sports clubs and sports governing bodies in Brent. The task group is aiming to report its findings and recommendations in July 2008.

### **Climate change**

The Climate Change task group has been set up to monitor the implementation and evaluate the results of the council's Carbon Management Strategy and Implementation Plan 2006-11. The Group will also identify and examine opportunities for the council to reduce its CO2 emissions further. The task group has started its work, but isn't expected to report until December 2008.

## **Section 6 - Proposed Task Groups**

The task groups listed below have been scoped with the intention of starting and completing the work in 2008/09. Updates on the work of the task groups will be included in the overview and scrutiny newsletter "Spotlight", which is published quarterly. Full details on each of the reviews will be included in the 2008/09 Annual Report.

### **Safety of young people to and from schools**

This task group will look at the safety of young people as they travel to and from school. At a joint meeting of the Children and Young Person's Plan Steering Group and the Crime Strategic Partnership Group in July 2006, compelling evidence was presented which showed a clear link between incidences of robbery and school term times and dates and the areas around schools and transport routes. The task group will look at the work that has been done since July 2006 and consider ways to improve pupil safety when they travel to and from school.

### **Transition services for socially excluded 18-25 year olds**

This task group will look at transition services for socially excluded 18 to 25 year olds as they move from youth services into adult services and the potential difficulties that arise when this happens. In Brent there are few services offering bespoke approaches for this age group and no body offering a strategic overview. The task group will consider what can be done to improve the offering for this vulnerable group of people.

### **Local bus routes to hospitals in Brent**

Good public transport routes to hospitals and other health facilities are crucial to help people, especially those from poorer communities, get the care that they need to maintain healthy lives. Local hospital travel plans highlight that bus routes to Northwick Park and Central Middlesex hospitals are not meeting the needs of patients and staff. The task group will look at good practice to see how other council's have tackled this issue, as well as take evidence from other stakeholders, such as Transport for London, to see what can be done to overcome these issues.

### **Community use of council owned buildings**

This is an area which has been identified by both officers and members as in need of improvement in Brent. The scrutiny review would look at how the council can develop a clear approach to managing buildings that are leased for use by the community and voluntary sector. It would ensure fairness for all parts of the community are at the heart of this. The review could help to inform a wider Council policy and strategy on asset management and the third sector. The findings would also feed into Brent's response to the Quirk review.

## **Section 7 – Issues for development in 2008/09**

Overview and scrutiny at Brent has continued to develop in 2007/08, but it is important that the function innovates and embraces new challenges. Councillors and officers involved in the scrutiny process have identified a number of development issues that will need to be addressed in 2008/09. Some of these issues are in response to local circumstances, others as a result of new legislation and additional responsibilities for overview and scrutiny.

### **Recommendation tracking**

Overview and scrutiny committees are not able to take decisions. Their power comes from their ability to influence policy and services, via making recommendations to the council's Executive or external organisations such as the PCT. Most recommendations are made as a result of in-depth review work carried out by task groups. A task group can take anything up to 6 months to complete its investigations and often spends many hours looking in detail at a particular issue and making recommendations for change and improvement. It is important if the recommendations of the task group are accepted for implementation that the overview and scrutiny committee responsible for the recommendations tracks their implementation. A recommendation tracking system for task group recommendations was agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2007.

There is a balance to be struck when following up recommendations. It is important that committees follow up their recommendations to ensure that they are being implemented. But, committees have limited time and resources to carry out their scrutiny work. They can't spend all their time following up recommendations when they want to consider new and different issues.

In 2008/09, the Local Democracy Team and the overview and scrutiny committees will work to try and embed follow up of scrutiny recommendations into the mainstream performance management of the council. Once a recommendation has been accepted by the Executive, it should be implemented in the same way that other Executive decisions are. Likewise, monitoring progress of the implementation shouldn't just fall to overview and scrutiny, but be brought into the council's performance monitoring framework.

### **Closer working between Scrutiny Committees**

Councillors and officers have acknowledged that the 6 overview and scrutiny committees at Brent should work together more closely to secure the best outcomes they can for people who live in Brent and also for the council. It is important that links are made between different parts of the scrutiny process, to ensure that issues are followed through to their conclusion.

For example, the Budget Panel has made a number of recommendations to different overview and scrutiny committees. Much of the Performance and Finance Select Committee work programme has been developed as a result

of the work and recommendations of the Budget Panel. Committee chairs have also identified closer working as an issue. The chair of the Forward Plan Select Committee has undertaken to refer items to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, so they can follow up decisions that the Forward Plan Select Committee weren't convinced should be taken. Although these are just simple examples, committees are becoming aware of the need to work together to make the structure of overview and scrutiny at Brent as effective as possible.



## **Responding to the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act**

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) has received Royal Assent and its different elements are gradually being enacted. Overview and scrutiny needs to respond to various elements within this act:

- Councillor Call for Action and the implications for overview and scrutiny
- Requiring the Executive to respond to overview and scrutiny
- Requiring the attendance of decision makers at committee
- Information should be supplied on request from partner authorities
- Working with LINKs.

A number of these issues will need thinking through to decide how overview and scrutiny should react. Protocols will be developed to deal with new powers for councillors to place items on the agendas of overview and scrutiny committees. Councillor Call for Action will also require a protocol that should be followed to stop committee agendas becoming too full. There are a number of possible criteria that the committee could use when considering a CCfA, some of the following have been produced by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. These include:

- Is the committee satisfied that reasonable attempts at a resolution have been made by the ward councillor via neighbourhood working, or by the Executive?
- Has the service area or partner been informed and been given enough time to resolve the issue?
- Has the committee considered a similar issue recently?
- Is it a case that should be pursued through the council's complaints system?
- Is there a more complex strategic issue at the heart of the matter that could not be resolved at a lower level?

The council has an active neighbourhood working function, and it would make sense to try to deal with Councillor Call for Action at a local level, before the matter is referred to an overview and scrutiny committee.

Agreement will have to be reached with the council's Executive to decide what constitutes a suitable response to overview and scrutiny recommendations. The Executive will have to say what (if any) action it intends to take once a recommendation is made. Noting recommendations is probably not acceptable. Likewise, the attendance of Executive members at overview and scrutiny will be a requirement, reinforcing the legislation in the Local Government Act 2000. Agreement will have to be reached on the amount of notice required for Executive members to attend. The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has already raised this issue at Full Council.

One of the biggest changes will be the relationship with external organisations. Already the overview and scrutiny function engages with a

variety of external organisations, such as Brent PCT and community and voluntary sector groups. The changes in the act give overview and scrutiny committees the right to receive information from external organisations, mainly Local Area Agreement and Sustainable Community Strategy partners. This includes:

- Fire and rescue
- Police
- The chief officer of the police
- Waste disposal authority
- Transport for London
- Primary Care Trust
- Regional Development Agency
- National Health Service Trust
- Local Probation Board
- Arts Council of England
- English Sport Council
- Environment Agency
- Health and Safety Executive
- Learning and Skills Council for England
- Secretary of State – only in relation to a highways authority.

Again, this will have to be managed to ensure that relationships remain positive with external organisations, but at the same time, if a committee needs to use its new powers, it should not be afraid to do so providing the issue warrants it. Some work has started in this area already. For example, the Local Strategic Partnership now produces an annual report which is presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Performance and Finance Select Committee is working on monitoring performance indicators in relation to LAA targets. This will effect partner organisations as much as Brent Council.

Finally, the establishment of Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) to replace Patient and Public Involvement Forums gives the Health Select Committee a great opportunity to work in partnership with community groups and members of the public to influence and improve the services provided by local health organisations. As the LINK is established work will begin to develop the relationship between the Health Select Committee and the LINK host. This will be an ongoing piece of work throughout 2008/09.

### **Relationship with the council's Executive**

During 2007/08, concerns have been raised about the relationship that overview and scrutiny has with the council's Executive. There is particular concern about the way that recommendations from overview and scrutiny are dealt with by the Executive. It is quite common for recommendations to be noted. This can be frustrating for scrutiny councillors, who put in time and effort, particularly in task groups, to develop evidenced based recommendations. When a recommendation is noted, is it being accepted?

This situation may change once the regulations for the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 come forward. As a result of the act, overview and scrutiny committees can expect a response to its recommendations from the Executive. It is doubtful that noting recommendations would be considered an adequate response.

Section 122 (3) of the Act states:

“The overview and scrutiny committee must by notice in writing require the authority or executive—

- (a) to consider the report or recommendations,
- (b) to respond to the overview and scrutiny committee indicating what (if any) action the authority propose, or the executive proposes, to take,
- (c) if the overview and scrutiny committee has published the report or recommendations under subsection (2), to publish the response,
- (d) if the overview and scrutiny committee provided a copy of the report or recommendations to a member of the authority under section 21A(8), to provide the member with a copy of the response,

and to do so within two months beginning with the date on which the authority or executive received the report or recommendations or (if later) the notice”.

Work will have to be done to agree locally what constitutes an appropriate response, but the Act is clear – the Executive should state what action (or not) will be taken to implement the recommendation.

It is hoped that the overview and scrutiny function can come to an agreement with the Executive early in 2008/09 to resolve this situation. Agreement also has to be reached on Executive councillor attendance at overview and scrutiny committees. A realistic notice period will have to be agreed so that unreasonable demands are not placed on Executive members. At the same time, overview and scrutiny should be given every opportunity to carry out their role, and that includes questioning Executive councillors.

### **Member development**

Scrutiny can only be effective if members are engaged and committed to the process. However, in order to get the best of out the members who sit on overview and scrutiny committees, it is crucial that they have the skills to be good scrutineers. Councillors are often very good ward representatives, but effective scrutiny requires a different set of skills.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny has developed four principles for effective scrutiny. They are:

- provides ‘critical friend’ challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers

- is carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny process
- drives improvement in public services
- enables the voice and concerns of the public and its communities.

Training on the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 took place in November 2007 and the Local Democracy Team and Member Development Manager has arranged further scrutiny training for councillors in July 2008, based around the four principles of effective scrutiny. The training will be carried out by Tim Young, formally head of overview and scrutiny at the London Borough of Camden. It is important for the development of the overview and scrutiny function at Brent that members look to refresh their skills and improve the way they work in overview and scrutiny committees and task groups. Key skills for effective scrutiny include questioning and influencing, summarising evidence into concise, "SMART" recommendations and selecting a work programme that engages all members of the committee and members of the public.