



Overview and Scrutiny
Annual Report 2008-2009

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Foreword by Councillor Lesley Jones

Over the past year overview and scrutiny in Brent has been at the forefront of issues that matter to local people. As well as tackling areas that are unique to our borough, we have also brought a local perspective to national issues. Scrutiny has responded to concerns around child protection following the tragic death of Baby Peter, as the economic downturn deepened we looked at the local impact of the recession raising concerns around the need to support residents and boost the local economy. Brent was also affected by the collapse of the Icelandic banks and scrutiny played a role in looking at what led to this situation as well as what further safeguards need to be put in place to protect future investments.

The scrutiny structure put in place three years ago has now embedded and we have been able to focus on strengthening the communication between our committee. A new scrutiny chairs meeting is helping to achieve this. We have also revamped our website, produced an information leaflet for witnesses and conducted annual surveys of participant's experience of scrutiny. The results were not completed in time for last year's annual report but this year we have been able to draw some useful comparisons.

Involving members of the public in our work remains a challenge, as it is across overview and scrutiny nationally. Our new leaflet is being distributed and has gone some way to raise our profile. Overview and scrutiny committees have held meetings at venues outside the town hall, and have visited local services to speak to staff, customers and carers to get a first hand experience of how things are working on the ground.

This annual report comes at a time when the council is undergoing a major transformation programme. Increasing pressure on budgets means that we need to identify £50 million worth of savings over the next four years. Service reviews will be taking place across the organisation to consider how services can be modernised and provided more efficiently. There is a key role for scrutiny in this process. Members often have the in-depth knowledge of local communities and will need to ensure that services are being shaped to meet the needs of our diverse and vibrant communities. Overview and scrutiny committees will need to carefully examine the service review proposals.

Overall I am pleased with the progress we have made this year and believe that the function is well placed to deal with any challenges that may lie ahead.

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.

Overview and scrutiny in Brent

In Brent, we have established an overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has four sub committees with a distinct focus and remit. They are the Health Select Committee, Performance and Finance Select Committee, the Forward Plan Select Committee, and the Budget Panel.

Each committee, except the Budget Panel, has a membership of eight non-Executive councillors. The Budget Panel has six members. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee also have six additional co-opted members from the education sector in Brent, as required by law. Four of the co-opted members have voting rights. Two are non-voting. Each committee is politically balanced to reflect the overall political balance of the council.

The committees meet between six and twelve times a year. All meetings are held in public. Each committee is responsible for setting its own work programme and deciding what it wishes to scrutinise. In addition to holding meetings, the committees can set up time limited task groups to look in more depth at a particular issue they wish to scrutinise.

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 is to provide examples from each committee of how this has been achieved during 2008/9.

A great place

Clean and Green – The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has set up two task groups, one to look at climate change in Brent, the second to look at ways to increase participation in recycling in flats, both of which support the council's sustainability agenda.

Safe – The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up a task group to consider the safety of children as they travel to and from school. The committee also looked at the work being done to prevent homophobic bullying in schools in Brent. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has set up a task group to look at the services provided for women exiting prostitution.

Lively – The Performance and Finance Select Committee has set up a task group looking at community use of council owned building to ensure that the provision was equitable and that all local community groups had the opportunity to access council buildings.

A borough of opportunity

Local employment and enterprise – The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the local impact of the recession to ensure that the council is taking steps to protect the local economy and jobs.

Health and well being - Health and well-being is the focus of the work of the Health Select Committee. The committee has reviewed the plans and performance of local health organisations and has recently completed a joint task group with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Public Transport Access to Health Sites in Brent.

Help when you need it – The Overview and Scrutiny Committee looked at services in place to protect vulnerable adults, including older people and those with a physical or learning disabilities.

One community

Settled homes - The Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutinised performance information relating to registered social landlords operating in Brent. The Forward Plan Select Committee considered the Housing Strategy 2009-14.

Early excellence – The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee has taken an active interest in support for children and has looked at provision for looked after children and those with special educational needs.

Community engagement – The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recently reviewed the work of the neighbourhood working project, a councillor led project which provides each ward with an annual budget of £20,000 to be spent on local projects.

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.

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.

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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 oversees 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 Kanta Mistry	Councillor David Clues
Councillor HB Patel	Councillor Bobby Thomas

The committee met six times in 2008/9. The committee spent time scrutinising a variety of issues in 2008/9 including:

Discussion with the Leader of the Council

This year the committee sought to improve its working relationship with the Executive. Therefore in July 2008, the Leader of the Council, Councillor Paul Lorber attended the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to set out the administrations priorities and hear the concerns of the committee. The priorities are:

- Crime and the fear of crime
- Regeneration and economic prosperity
- Services for young people
- Environmental sustainability

The committee questioned the leader about other important issues including outcomes for looked after children, extended schools and the library service as a catalyst for regeneration. At the request of the committee, Councillor Lorber agreed to attend Overview and Scrutiny on a six monthly basis.

Councillor Lorber attended committee again in February 2009 to provide an update on the progress with the priorities and answer questions. The committee asked for further information on the impact of the recession, provision of new social housing, efforts to recruit more social care staff and delivering on the new improving public services programme in a future meeting.

Safeguarding adult's services

The committee considered a report by the council and its partners on measures in Brent to protect vulnerable adults, including older people and those with a physical or learning disability. Witnesses attending the session included the Police, NHS Brent, Assistant Director Community Care, the Safeguarding Adults Co-ordinator, and the Vice Chair of BrAVA who is also the Director of Mencap, to contribute to the discussion and take questions from members.

The report presented to the committee outlined developments and progress as well as the outcome of the Commission for Social Care Inspection on Independence, Well-being and Choice. The inspection report recognised the important role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in strengthening governance and accountability within safeguarding adults. The report specifically stated that:

“Councillors scrutinised the annual safeguarding report and asked challenging questions about the data. We are confident that with the support of managers, councillors would in time develop increasing knowledge in respect by their role in driving up improvements in this key area of the council's responsibility,”

Officers reported that a robust action plan had been developed to address weaknesses identified in the inspection report and members asked for this to come back to the committee. The committee also asked officers for a briefing on how councillors could recognise possible signs of abuse in adults and raised concerns about possible shortfalls in mental health funding during the recession. They were assured that funding had not been affected. Members were also concerned about a possible increase in financial abuse as a result of direct payments. It was reported that safeguards would be put in place to ensure that this does not happen. This remained an area of interest for the committee and members asked for further details about the multi agency protocol and a more meaningful use of statistics in future reports.

Consultation on modernising learning disabilities day services

The committee considered the progress with a consultation on changes to learning disabilities day centres. This proposal suggested that services move from a three day centre bases to two with more outreach facilities. It was subject to considerable concern and opposition from carers and users, none of whom wanted to see change to the existing day centres. Two carers had lodged a formal complaint which had led to an external review.

Recommendations had been made as a result of the investigation and an action plan had been drawn up. Members pointed out that many residents would have lost confidence and trust in the consultation process. The committee were informed that the council had learnt from the process and as a result were being clearer and more open. The committee requested a further update on the progress and agreed to visit the Strathcona Learning Disability Day Centre and a group of carers.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reported back from this visit at the meeting in February. It had been a positive experience as members had the opportunity to see the facility and ask questions. Carers also felt reassured by the visit as councillors had shown interest in their concerns. Following the visit a number of questions raised by carers were sent to the service on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A response to those questions was circulated at the meeting.

The committee considered an interim report on the proposals at its meeting on the 24th March. Members were informed that there had been a change of approach regarding provision of the service resulting in new sites for relocation being identified. The committee requested that the final proposals be brought back in autumn 2009.

Local impact of the recession

The committee asked for a report on the emerging effects of the recession in the borough and actions being taken to support local communities during this difficult time. The Director of Policy and Regeneration informed the committee that it was too early to draw conclusions on the impacts of the recession but the situation was being rigorously monitored. Regeneration could be used as a catalyst to boost the economy and the council would need to take higher risks and adopt new approaches to regenerating local areas. Committee members suggested the need to boost the supply side to generate jobs. The committee were also concerned that recession could lead to an increase in crime; the Director reported that there was no evidence for this at the present time. The committee asked for further information on the impact of the recession at future meetings. It was suggested that if specific issues emerged a task group could be convened.

Neighbourhood working

The committee considered the progress of this initiative after its first year of operation. Neighbourhood working is a flagship Brent council project which sees every ward given an annual budget of £20,000 to spend on local issues. Projects are prioritised by ward councillors to tackle issues raised by local residents. The Neighbourhood Working Manager reported that they are now operating in twenty one wards across the borough and structures had been set up, although the team had only been fully staffed since December 2008. Key successes from the project included the ward walkabouts of which there had been 42 in 19 wards. There had also been 560 returns from a leaflet asking residents to highlight three key issues in their ward. Members raised concerns about poor communication with councillors about what was taking place in their wards, the lack of a support worker, the length of time it takes for some projects to get up and running. The committee asked to revisit this issue within six months paying particular attention to members' satisfaction with the process, new ways of involving a wider range of residents and engagement and commitment of members in general.

Members Information Technology

The committee considered a report which outlined IT issues experienced by members and changes to the way the service would be delivered across the council. The committee were particularly concerned that many members had experienced problems with their IT which was impacting on their ability to do their job as an increasing number of constituents expected to be able to communicate through electronic means. The Head of IT reported that an improvement programme to upgrade IT services was currently taking place including replacement of existing servers with a new data centre and plans to migrate services from Lotus Notes to Microsoft Outlook which would be more user friendly. The department agreed to conduct a review of IT provision for members which would come back to the committee once completed.

Task Groups

The following task groups have been commissioned by this committee:

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 task group will also identify and examine opportunities for the council to reduce its CO2 emissions further. The members of the task group are Councillor HB Patel (chair), Councillor D Jackson and Councillor H Singh.

Increasing participation in recycling in Brent

The committee received a report regarding barriers to achieving higher participation in recycling and composting services in Brent. As a result the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned a task group of members to look at best practice in providing recycling facilities on housing estates, for houses in multiple occupation and flats. The members of the task group are Councillor Clues, Councillor Thomas and Councillor HB Patel.

Services for Women Exiting Prostitution

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed in December 2008 to set up a task group to identify the scale and nature of prostitution in Brent and come up with recommendations to tackle the supply of prostitutes and the demand for sex services. A report published by the Poppy Project in August 2008 *Big Brothel – a survey of the off- street sex industry*, highlighted the scale and nature of the brothel industry in London. When they looked at the number of adverts for brothels in local newspapers, Brent was identified as having the second highest number of adverts. The task group is chaired by Councillor Ann John OBE other members are Councillor Clues and Councillor Mistry. Councillors will be assisted by DCI Kevin Concannon from Brent Police and Andy Brown Head of Substance misuse from NHS Brent.

Transition services for vulnerable 16-24 year olds

This task group was set up to look at transition services for socially excluded 18 to 24 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 or organisations offering a strategic overview. The task group will consider what can be done to improve the services provided for this vulnerable group of people. The task group is chaired by Councillor Lesley Jones and includes Councillors Arthur Steele and Will Motley.



Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chair – Councillor Will Motley

The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee covers 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 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 Emily Tancred

Voting Co-optees:

Rev Phil Stone
Mrs Bondzi-Simpson
Mr Lorenzato
Mr Akisanya

Non-Voting Co-optees:

Dr Levison
Mr Al-Khoei

In addition there was a wide range of observers from sectors of the teaching profession and also occasional members of the Brent Youth Parliament

The committee met six times in 2008/9 and it scrutinised a number of key issues including:

Brent Youth Parliament

The committee maintains a keen interest in the Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) which began in March 2007. Members were pleased to be informed by BYP members that young people themselves felt that they had an influence and that their work was making an impact particularly around cheaper access to sports facilities and patrol officers on buses on the journey to and from school. The committee urged officers to ensure that BYP encourage a wide membership from across the community by working with schools and youth groups to raise awareness of BYP. The committee has requested that a member of BYP serve as a regular observer on the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

School places

In Brent there is an on-going problem around provision of school places in both primary and secondary schools. The committee recognise that this is a major concern to the council and local people therefore this topic remains a priority and an update on the numbers of pupils without a school place and action taken to address this is given at every committee meeting.

Special Projects for pupils without a school place

As a result of its continuing scrutiny of school places, the committee also reviewed special projects for secondary pupils who arrived in Brent and were without a school place. Members were informed that projects had been set up in a number of schools. Generally, the projects were making a significant contribution and children were doing well with good exam results. However there were concerns relating to the need for access to educational psychology support, special educational needs provision and the adequacy of accommodation. The committee found that officers were doing an excellent job in developing solutions to a very difficult situation.

Equalities impact of school places provision in the south of the borough

In June last year the committee considered a report on the equalities impact of the school places shortage in the south of the borough. Some of the teacher representatives who attend the committee had repeatedly expressed concern that black pupils who are concentrated in the south of the borough are discriminated against because they have to travel further to school than their Asian counterparts who live in the north. The council insisted that it had considered this issue and vehemently denied the claim. After considering the evidence the committee moved a motion that "In the light of evidence in this report the school places strategy, as outlined here does not have an impact that is racially discriminatory on the south of the borough"

Sports provision

In September 2008, members considered a report on sports provision for young people, which highlighted that the council was one of many sports providers in Brent. The council policy was to ensure that 5-16 year-olds did two hours of sport each week. Currently 83% were doing so. There was also competitive sport both within and between schools, and teams had represented the borough at the London Youth Games. In response to suggestions from members about measures to improve early access to cycling and sailing, the officers agreed that these would be covered in the sports strategy, which was currently being revised.

Kilburn Partnership

In March 2007 the committee received a petition from residents in North Kilburn who were concerned that the lack of sports facilities in their area was contributing to a rise in antisocial behaviour amongst young people. The committee asked for the youth services department to work with the residents to try and develop solutions. The committee received an update on this work in November 2008 and were pleased to find that a local partnership has been established and is working together to find resources for a community facility. The meeting welcomed this approach and considered that it could possibly work in other parts of the borough in future.

Homophobic bullying

A report by Stonewall highlighted that bullying towards young people who are gay or perceived to be gay is significant and increasing in schools across the UK. The chair of the Children and Families Committee has sought to raise awareness of the issue to ensure that it is being tackled in Brent. It was first considered by the committee in 2007. The Chair also raised it at a Full Council meeting to secure council wide support.

In February 2009 a further discussion was held to talk about the work that had been taking place to tackle this sensitive issue. Witnesses included:

- The LGBT Co-ordinator at Stoke Newington School in Hackney
- The Education Officer at Stonewall
- Mosaic LGBT Youth Programme Manager.

Members were informed that since the committee had shown an interest in this area a number of activities had taken place. In November 2007, a conference was held, the first major event aimed at tackling homophobic bullying in Brent schools. The Secondary Behaviour and Attendance Consultant informed members that progress to tackling homophobic bullying in schools was improving and guidance was being updated. The council is working with Stonewall, Mosaic and Teachers Unions to raise the profile of this issue and develop some pilot projects.

The committee agreed to revisit this issue in a year's time to look at the progress made in encouraging schools to adopt specific policies and good practice in this area and also to assess the involvement in LGBT History Month in February 2010.

Child protection

The committee considered child protection in Brent. Given the recent events surrounding the tragic death of Baby Peter members were keen to ensure that all systems in Brent were delivering services to a high standard. The Director for Children Services and the Assistant Director, Social Care attended the committee to present the report and answer questions. A Detective Sergeant from Brent and Harrow Child Abuse Investigation Team also attended to provide the police perspective.

The committee was informed that there had been an internal review of child protection services. Although the results were positive, some additional support will be provided including additional funding for extra posts in the child protection team. The committee recommended that the Chair of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee should have a greater involvement in child protection issues including membership of key meetings where this issue is monitored and discussed.

The following task group has been commissioned by this committee:

Safety of young people on the journey to and from school

This task group is looking 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, 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.



Budget Panel

Chair – Councillor Alan Mendoza

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 principal 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 Pawan Gupta
Councillor Valerie Brown (Vice Chair)	Councillor Ann John
Councillor Mark Cummins	Councillor Mohammed Butt

The Budget Panel met seven times between July 2008 and February 2009 and received presentations and evidence from a range of sources including across the council and other local authorities.

The Budget Panel produced three 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:

- Recommendations in our previous (February 2008) report in relation to the 2008/09 budget which need to be reiterated in relation to the 2009/10 budget.
- Recommendations in our previous report where we believe further action is needed to implement them.
- New recommendations which have come out of our work on the 2009/10 budget.

The Panel made the following recommendations specifically in relation to the 2009/10 budget:

- 1.) That given the current budget challenges and demands facing the council the administration should consider all options to ensure the delivery of high quality services to our residents. This includes:
 - The range of Council Tax increase available 0-5%
 - Identification of further savings on top of those agreed by the Executive in October
 - Using service transformation programmes to offset the impact of demand pressures on the budget
 - Using Area Based Grant and Performance Reward Grant to fund priorities linked to the Local Area Agreement
- 2.) That Members from all three political groups receive a briefing on the results of the work being carried out in the Children and Families department to review cases following the Haringey investigation.
- 3.) That the Audit Committee decides how to provide members with the opportunity to scrutinise the council's investments and investment processes.
- 4.) That all measures are taken to lobby ministers about the proposed changes to the methodology for the Working Neighbourhood Fund Grant.
- 5.) That the Budget panel is kept informed about the results of the process aimed at reallocating resources from the area based grant to deliver on LAA priorities.
- 6.) That the detailed proposals for the new approach to funding the schools capital programme be brought to the Budget Panel when available.
- 7.) That the fees and charges policy is again considered by the Budget Panel before it is adopted by the council.
- 8.) That the Executive seeks to ensure that the council is able to respond rapidly to changing economic circumstances, in terms of expenditure, resourcing and priority levels for service provision".
- 9.) That all overview and scrutiny committees should consider holding at least one meeting per year when all members have the opportunity to question the relevant lead members.
- 10.) That all fees and charges are considered in a single report by the Budget Panel at the same stage next year.
- 11.) That the council lobbies for more influence and flexibility over the use of funding in the schools budget.

In their final report, which followed the publication of the proposed 2009/10 budget, the Budget Panel highlighted a number of areas of concern:

One of the Budget Panel's main concerns was the level of risk in the budget, particularly given the rapidly changes economic circumstances, the continued overspend in Adult Social Care, and aftermath of the Baby Peter case.

Following the collapse of Icelandic banks and falling interest rates, the panel was informed that the investment strategy was more cautious and returns were not as good as previously available. There were concerns about what would happen if the £15 million deposited in

Icelandic banks was not returned to the council. The panel were informed that there would be no effect on the delivery of the 2009/10 budget and that it was likely that if there were eventual losses they could be accounted for over an extended period of time starting in 2010/11.

Assumptions about inflation were more difficult to make than in previous years, but the Deputy Leader expected an average of 2% over the year.

The investment of over £1m into children's services was welcomed but the risk related to recruiting and retaining additional social workers was significant given the current shortage and the stigmatisation of the profession. There had been a 35% increase in the number of referrals which may lead to an increase of looked after children.

Given some of the impacts of the recession, the risk to the budget and the pace of change the Budget Panel would recommend that the Executive ensures that the council is able to respond rapidly to changing economic circumstances.

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Performance and Finance Select Committee

Chair – Councillor Anthony Dunn

In 2008/9 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 2008/09 were:

Councillor Anthony Dunn (Chair)	Councillor Lena Ahmed
Councillor Harshadbhai Patel (V. Chair)	Councillor Alan Mendoza
Councillor Daniel Bessong	Councillor Zaffar Van Kalwala
Councillor Muhammed Butt	Councillor Rob Pagnamenta

The main issues considered by the committee in 2008/09 were:

Delivery of waste contract

A new waste contract was agreed by the council in April 2007. The committee took a keen interest in monitoring its progress. The committee paid particular attention to recycling, street cleansing missed collections and complaints. It was reported that the new waste contract meant an improved cleaning regime through an increase in street sweeping. There were ongoing challenges with contamination of recycling leading to waste being rejected and sent to landfill. Members were informed that clear and comprehensive information was being sent to residents concerning what materials should be recycled and the reduction in contaminated loads in early 2008/9 showed that this was having an effect. There are ongoing improvements on numbers of missed collections but as of July 2008, the target of 45 missed bins per 100,000 had not been reached.

Compulsory recycling was introduced in Brent on 4th August 2008. Members were informed that this had an immediate improvement on recycling levels. The introduction of the scheme led to a rise in complaints but there was a decline in complaints related to street cleansing. The committee raised some concerns expressed by local residents about recycling, such as the green box collections being stolen. Members were advised that green boxes could be marked with an identifier. There were also concerns about fines as a result of the compulsory recycling scheme. Some residents in multi-occupancy dwellings were angry that they had received a letter about not participating in the compulsory recycling scheme when

they had. The committee recommended that the letter be revised for these types of properties.

Icelandic banks

The collapse of the Icelandic banking system hit national headlines last autumn especially as a number of local authorities, including Brent had deposited public money in their accounts. The committee discussed this issue in November and December 2008. The council had deposited around £15 million with two Icelandic banks. The Director of Finance and Corporate Resources reported to the committee that at any one time the council might have between £90-£130 million to lend out and the revenue budget relied on interest earned on loans. Organisations such as the Local Government Association were working on behalf of councils to make representation to the government to seek refunds and guarantees for the deposits. There was a strong expectation that money would be returned through the administration process. The committee had a further discussion on the council's investment strategy and expressed concern that there had been an overreliance on the credit ratings for these banks and requested that credit rating agencies need to be encouraged to be more stringent about how they produce the ratings and the information sources that they use. The councils treasury advisors were asked to look into this issue. In February 2009, members were informed that steps were being taken to increase the involvement by councillors in overseeing and scrutinising council investments.

The Best Value Performance Plan

This report provided the committee with details of the council's end of year performance measured against the national set of best value performance indicators. The report highlighted improvements in street cleanliness and increase in the use of sports facilities by young people. Areas identified for improvement included educational outcomes for looked after children, graffiti, and increase library and museum visits. The committee was informed that areas for improvement would feed into the Local Area Agreement.

Quarterly Performance Reports

Quarterly Performance Reports provide the committee with information on council spending, activity throughout the year and targets achieved in relation to the Corporate Strategy. They also detail the progress in the move from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment to the Comprehensive Area Assessment and the implementation of the new Improvement and Efficiency Strategy. The Director for Finance and Corporate Resources also included an overview of the council's budget position.

Building the evidence base - Population statistics and IMD

The committee looked at the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and population information in June 2008. With the move from Comprehensive Performance Assessment to Comprehensive Area Assessment the council has placed more emphasis on strengthening its evidence base and this data would help to form a strong evidence for future policy planning across the council. Members were informed that there is concern that government statistics compiled by the Office of National Statistics on population figures in Brent were likely were underestimated, therefore the council had commissioned its own study, using a far wider range of sources to try and ascertain a more accurate figure. The committee welcomed this work and hoped it would be a the basis for a discussion with government around more accurate population counting for Brent as this had a significant impact on the amount of government funding that the council received. Members were informed that as

grants were fixed for a three year period this would not have an immediate impact on the financial settlement.

The committee looked at the IMD in February 2009. Members were informed that Brent had moved from being the 88th most deprived authority in the country to the 53rd with most of its neighbourhoods having become more deprived. The committee inquired as to why deprivation is on the increase in Brent. The answer was very complex and the population is very mobile. Despite the increases in deprivation there had been some positive news with increases in the number of people in employment.

Revenues and Benefits performance

Despite the downturn in the economy that commenced in the second half of 2008, the council's Council Tax collection contractor Capita continued to maintain an upward trajectory in the level of domestic Council Tax rates to achieve an all time high figure of over 95.37%. It is anticipated that having achieved the highest ever level of National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) collection of 99.07% in 2007-08, the impact of recent legislation removing exemptions from empty premises plus the recession may result in lower levels of NNDR collection.

The committee was delighted to learn that Brent had been awarded the 'Most Improved Team of the Year 2008' by the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation for the performance of the Benefits Service in delivering prompt and accurate benefits assessments and advice. This was a shining example of what the borough was capable of delivering and staff members were congratulated for their achievement.

Community use of Council owned buildings

The select committee also completed a task group on community use of council owned buildings which is detailed in the 'completed task groups' section.

Health Select Committee

Chair – Councillor Chris Leaman



The Health Select Committee scrutinises the performance of local NHS Trusts to inform policy development within the council and help promote well-being across the borough.

The Health and Social Care Act 2001 extended the powers of scrutiny for all local authorities with social services responsibilities to cover local NHS bodies in England and Wales. The act 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 NHS trusts' performance in Brent, 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 eight councillors and is politically balanced. The Chair and Chief Executive of NHS Brent regularly attended meetings, along with senior personnel from North West London NHS Hospitals Trust, and Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (the local mental health Trust). Representatives from local patient groups and voluntary organisations have also been regularly invited to attend meetings.

The members of the committee in 2008/09 were:

Councillor Chris Leaman (Chair)	Councillor Uma Fernandes
Councillor Eddie Baker	Councillor Derek Jackson
Councillor David Clues	Councillor Ruth Moher
Councillor George Crane	Councillor Colum Moloney

The main issues considered by the committee in 2008/09 were:

North West London NHS Hospitals Financial Position

Members had been concerned about the significant deficits within the hospital trust budgets, both historic and day-to-day and were keen to know what steps were being taken to ensure the trust broke even in 2008/09 as well as maintain the same level of patient care. The committee expressed concern about how the process of making efficiencies would be made. Members were pleased when it was reported that the trust had broken even in 2008/09 (reporting a £100,000 surplus) but will continue to scrutinise the issue as a further £36m has to be saved for the trust to break even in 2009/10. In March the Trust reported that savings of £16 million had been identified, but members were concerned that further savings could affect patient care. Work is still continuing to identify possible savings proposals for the remaining £20m. The committee agreed to continue to monitor the Trusts financial position and associated savings plans.

Special Meeting at Northwick Park Hospital

In November 2008, the committee held a special meeting at Northwick Park Hospital. The agenda focused on the key issues faced by the North West London NHS Hospitals Trust. As well as the trust's Financial Position, members also considered:

Infection protection and control

There were specific concerns around the incidence and trends of MRSA and Clostridium Difficile over the past year. Officers highlighted that key the actions that had been put in place to prevent these infections and make progress on infection control. The hospital reported significant improvements in infection prevention and control. Members asked questions regarding measuring hand hygiene and steps to prevent patients bringing MRSA into the hospital. Overall the committee were pleased with the progress that the Trust had made.

Independent review of maternity services at Northwick Park Hospital

Maternity services at Northwick Park gained national media attention following three maternal deaths and two serious untoward incidents in 2007/8. The independent review conducted a full analysis of each of the cases as well as a review of risk management and governance arrangements in the maternity unit. The review found that while the deaths were regrettable, extenuating circumstances had been found in each of them and no fundamental deficiencies of care were found. However the review put forward some recommendations for improvement which the hospital turned into an action plan. The committee agreed to continue to monitor the take up of maternity services at Northwick Park Hospital.

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. In March 2009, the committee considered the self assessments from NHS Brent, North West London NHS Hospitals Trust and Central and North London NHS Foundation Trust. The committee provided a response in relation to each of the trusts declarations which were submitted to the newly formed Care Quality Commission with each of the trust's self assessments.

Local Involvement Networks

The Local involvement Network (LINKs) was set up in December 2008 to replace the Patient Public Involvement Forum. The committee monitored the transition process and looked at the issues around selection of the permanent LINK host, how the committee and the LINK could develop an effective working relationship and how the LINK would involve hard to reach members of the community. The committee also developed a protocol on joint working with the LINK setting out how the LINK could refer issues to the relevant overview and scrutiny committee and the required response.

Urgent Care Centre

The committee scrutinised plans for a new urgent care centre at Central Middlesex Hospital. Proposals were developed because large numbers of people turned up at the hospital in need of primary care. In the future the urgent care centre will treat these people, but also provide additional services, such as help with registering with a GP. The committee was concerned that an urgent care centre would deter residents from registering with a GP. NHS Brent agreed that publicity for the centre would need to be planned very carefully and would also work with GP practices to make registration easier.

Stroke and Trauma Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

In November 2008 a London wide Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) was set up to consider proposals to deliver a new specialist major trauma and stroke services at specific hospitals across London. The Chair of the Health Select Committee was the council's nominee on the JOSC. The committee endorsed NHS London's proposals for eight hyper acute stroke units in London and four major trauma centres. However, there were concerns about:

- The April 2010 deadline for implementing the new services
- Recruitment of specialist staff to work in the new units.
- Transferring patients from specialist units to local hospitals once specialist treatment has been received.
- Decisions on the future of stroke and major trauma services in London will be taken in July 2009. The JOSC will monitor implementation of its recommendations throughout 2009/10.

The committee commissioned the following task group:

Childhood Immunisation –

This task group is looking at the approach taken by NHS Brent and partners to increase childhood immunisation in the borough. Immunisation against illnesses such as measles, mumps, rubella, polio and diphtheria is crucial to protect the long term health of young people. Immunisation has the most robust evidence base in terms of safety, efficacy and cost effectiveness of all healthcare activities, but there have been longstanding problems in achieving good levels of coverage in London. Although Brent is performing reasonably well compared to London averages for childhood immunisation rates (except diphtheria, tetanus, polio and pertussis booster) compared to England averages, the borough does less well.

The task group will scrutinise plans to ensure targets for immunisation are on track to be met, look at best practice from other areas to see how immunisation levels have been increased and offer a critical friend challenge to NHS Brent, Brent Council and partners as they work on this vital area.

Forward Plan Select Committee

Chair – Councillor Janice Long



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.

The members of the Forward Plan Select Committee in 2008/09 were:

Councillor Janice Long (Chair)	Councillor David Coughlin
Councillor Emily Tancred	Councillor James Powney
Councillor Valerie Brown	Councillor Harshadbhai Patel
Councillor Alec Castle (Vice Chair)	Councillor Kanta Mistry

This year has been a pro-active year for the Forward Plan Select Committee and members have made numerous recommendations and suggestions to the council's Executive. The committee's main areas of work in 2008/09 included the following:

1. Call In

In 2008/09 the Forward Plan Select Committee called in thirteen reports. They were:

- Authority to Tender Contract for Insurance for Public Liability and Property Insurance
- Service Improvement – Proposed Structural Changes
- Modernising Transport – Authority to Award Contract for the Implementation of Phase 2 of the Transport Review
- Authority to Tender Contract for the Provision of Passenger Transport
- Progress Report on the Controlled Parking Zones Programme
- Review of Sports Facilities within Brent
- Council Travel Plan
- Domestic Vehicle Crossing Policy
- Petition against Kingsbury Road Local Safety scheme
- Housing Strategy 2009-14
- Supply and Demand and Temporary Accommodation
- North Circular Road Regeneration Area
- Local Development Framework – Core Strategy and Site Specific Allocations

Delegation of Anti-Social Behaviour Order Functions to Brent Housing Partnership

When considering proposals in this report, members noted that the Executive would not have the opportunity to consider implications for staffing within the Community Safety Team once the Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) functions were delegated to Brent Housing Partnership (BHP). As a result, members requested a further briefing note with regard to the Community Safety Team's position on this issue. The Lead Member and Lead Officer attended the select committee for this item. Because of concerns from the committee a meeting with the Lead Member for Housing and Customer Care, the Lead Member for Crime Prevention and Public Safety and the Director of Housing and Community Care took place to discuss the issue.

Domestic Vehicle Crossing Policy

The Forward Plan Select Committee made a number of recommendations regarding the new Domestic Vehicle Crossing Policy which was agreed by the Executive in September 2008. This policy sets out the council's approach to the construction of dropped kerbs to facilitate off street parking. The committee requested that the policy be presented to the Area Consultative Forums, that the Executive be requested to review the Policy within six months of its implementation and that that the Executive be minded to consider the enforcement arrangements taking into account concerns about the resources that were available. All the recommendations were accepted by the Executive

St Augustine's High School BSF Programme: Shared Community Use of New Sports Hall Facility (Provision of New Community Sports Hall in South Kilburn)

The committee were informed that an agreement had been made between Brent council, Westminster Council and St Augustine's High School on a land transfer agreement which would allow the school to build a facility on land previously owned by the council, whilst in return the council would acquire land from Westminster Council.

The agreement would mean Brent residents could use the school sports hall, whilst the land acquired would be used to build a new children's play area to replace the facilities on the land that had been transferred. The use of the sports hall would incur no costs to the Council, other than up to £50K of Section 106 funds to be used to provide capital funding to build reception facilities to make it suitable for "pay and display".

The select committee expressed concern that capital funds are being used for revenue purposes and that it hopes that this does not set a precedent. They were also concerned that there were no proactive measures to promote use of the Sports Hall for South Kilburn residents and requested that the Sports Service should promote such use.

Petition against the Kingsbury Road Local Safety Scheme

The committee called-in proposals regarding the scheme on Kingsbury Road to improve safety measures. One of the main proposals to achieve speed reduction was to reduce the number of lanes each way from two lanes to one. The committee was concerned that there had been insufficient consultation. The select committee requested that the Executive re-consider the Kingsbury Road Local Safety Scheme, including re-consulting residents, ward councillors and partner agencies before a new scheme is proposed.

North Circular Road Regeneration Area

In April, the select committee called in proposals for the regeneration of the North Circular Road. A vision document had been developed which outlined the strategic approach to the regeneration of the area adjacent to the North Circular. These plans had been a major cause for concern amongst residents and Members wanted to give it further consideration. Local residents from the Brentfield Estate who would be most affected by the issue attended the committee to share their concerns around the proposals and the consultation process. The committee made a number of recommendations to the Executive including that priority is given to resolving the concerns with residents before further action is taken

Housing Strategy 2009-14

The committee had a number of reservations around the new housing strategy, which seeks to consider housing within a wider strategic role and work with partners to tackle housing needs. The committee felt that there had been insufficient consultation with stakeholders, and were concerned that vulnerable groups were not addressed in the strategy. The committee recommended that the Executive agree that an action plan be put in place to expand the houses of multiple occupation registration scheme.

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Completed Task groups

Increasing participation in sport through sports clubs

This task group considered how the council can develop good quality sports clubs in the borough, identifying potential barriers and how they can be overcome. It has investigated how the council can involve community groups and encourage volunteering in sport.

The findings of the task group were developed around the following themes:

- Identifying and attracting those less likely to participate
- Expanding the availability of physical activity in local areas
- The role of Brent Sports Council Volunteers and Coaches
- Publicity on Marketing

The recommendations were endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22nd July 2008 and were agreed by the Executive in October 2008 noting that officers would be bringing forward, through the budget process, growth bids for consideration for those recommendations where additional resources are required. The committee will follow up the recommendations in 2009/10.

Public Transport Access to Health Sites

This task group was established in response to local concerns about transport access to health sites in Brent and proposals contained in the Lord Darzi's report on the future of healthcare for London. The Healthcare for London JOSC had identified public transport access to health facilities as being crucial to the delivery of good quality healthcare in London. The task group were also keen to promote active travel, encouraging people not to drive and use sustainable, environmentally friendly travel options. The task group's work focused on two key issues:

- Public transport access to health sites and the work that is taking place to improve access. This included hospitals in Brent and hospitals outside of the borough used by Brent residents and primary care facilities within the borough.
- How work is progressing to adapt transport services and improve access to health sites, as they are reconfigured to implement the vision of health services set out in *Healthcare for London*.

Recommendations were developed around the following themes:

- Strengthening Working Relationships
- Healthcare for London
- Service Planning
- Service Location
- Northwick Park Hospital
- Central Middlesex Hospital
- Transport Improvements

These recommendations were endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Health Select Committee in December 2008. The report was agreed by the Executive on 16th March 2009. The committee will follow up the recommendations in 2009/10.

Community use of council owned buildings

On the 25 March the Performance and Finance Select Committee agreed a task group review of community use of council owned buildings. The task group was commissioned to look at the approach to leasing property to the voluntary and community sector and ensure that council assets are used to their full potential. The task group was keen to reconsider arrangements for voluntary and community sector use of council buildings to ensure that outcomes contribute to the social regeneration of the local area and that arrangements are fair to all sections of the community. The task group's work focussed on contractual and leasing arrangements for current buildings and considered how they could be standardised. Members also looked at good practice from other councils on how they manage their properties with the third sector.

The final recommendations of the task group were developed around the following themes:

- Consider the framework for effective community use of council owned buildings
- Co-ordinate the council's approach
- Develop a consistent leasing policy
- Take account of the duty to involve
- Strengthen governance of the 'community portfolio' developed in line with any aspects developed within the voluntary sector strategy
- Continue to development the Voluntary Sector Resource Centre Project
- Feed into the response to the Quirk Review

These recommendations were endorsed by the Performance and Finance Select Committee and will now be forwarded to the council's Executive for consideration. The committee will follow up the recommendations in 2009/10.

Impact of task groups

Task groups are an important way for overview and scrutiny to contribute to service improvement and review. In Brent the impact of task group recommendations is monitored through a six month and one year feedback from the service department on progress on implementation. The value of task group work was highlighted when the council achieved three star in its equality standard rating, the report of made a specific mention of overview and scrutiny in being proactive in dealing with issues that impact upon equality.

This year task group activity contributed to the following achievements:

Voluntary Sector Funding

This task group was set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the programme of grants allocated to the voluntary sector by the council and was completed in May 2007. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the programme to implement the recommendations in May 2008 and found that 11 of the 12 task group recommendations had been wholly or partially implemented. This included developing a voluntary sector strategy and a voluntary sector conference, which was held this year.

Improving outcomes for African and African Caribbean pupils

The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up a task group to consider how to support pupils for whom statistics showed below average outcomes across a range of measures including educational attainment, school exclusions and crime. The final report went to the Executive in September 2007. The committee followed up the implementation of these recommendations earlier this year. It was highlighted that the Children and Families

department had made significant progress in implementing the recommendations of the task group. One of the recommendations of the task group included that more support be given to Somali Parents in supporting their children with homework, this work has begun and the Children and Families Committee have received reports on its progress.

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Overview and scrutiny annual survey

In 2008 the Local Democracy Team conducted its annual survey seeking views on participant's experience of scrutiny. The questionnaire was sent to all councillors, the co-opted members on the Children and Families Committee, officers and local organisations who had been involved in the overview and scrutiny process. The questionnaire contained a range of questions covering the themes of:

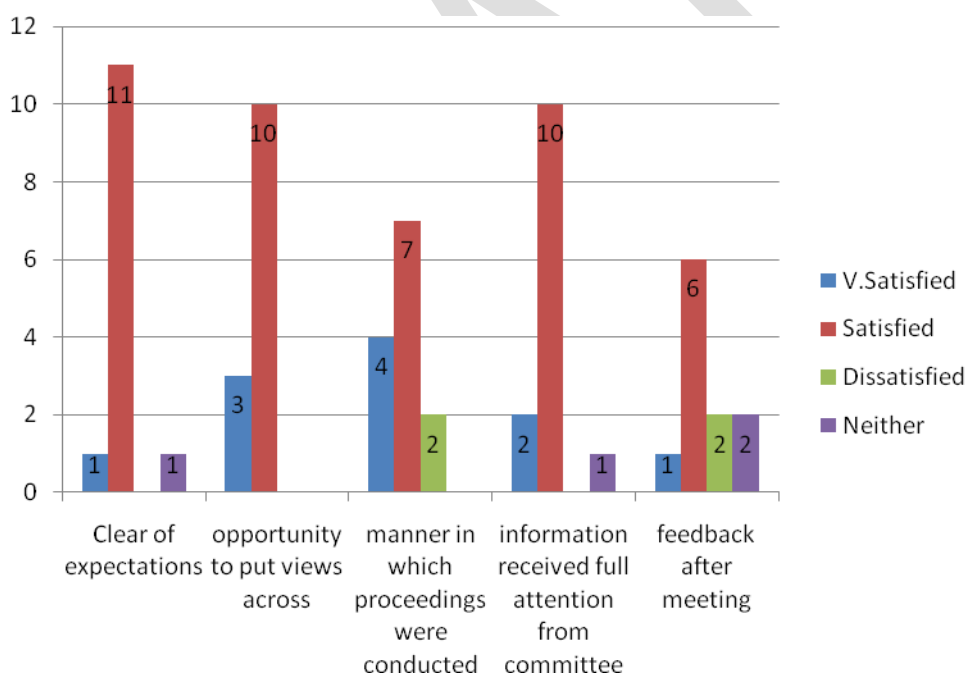
- Experience of the committee process
- Impact of overview and scrutiny
- Experience of task groups
- Public and media involvement in overview and scrutiny

Officers and local organisations questionnaire

In 2008, a total of 66 surveys were sent out with 16 returned giving an overall response rate of 24%. In 2009 the same survey was distributed to 45 officers and local organisations that have been involved in scrutiny and 10 were returned giving an overall response rate of 22%

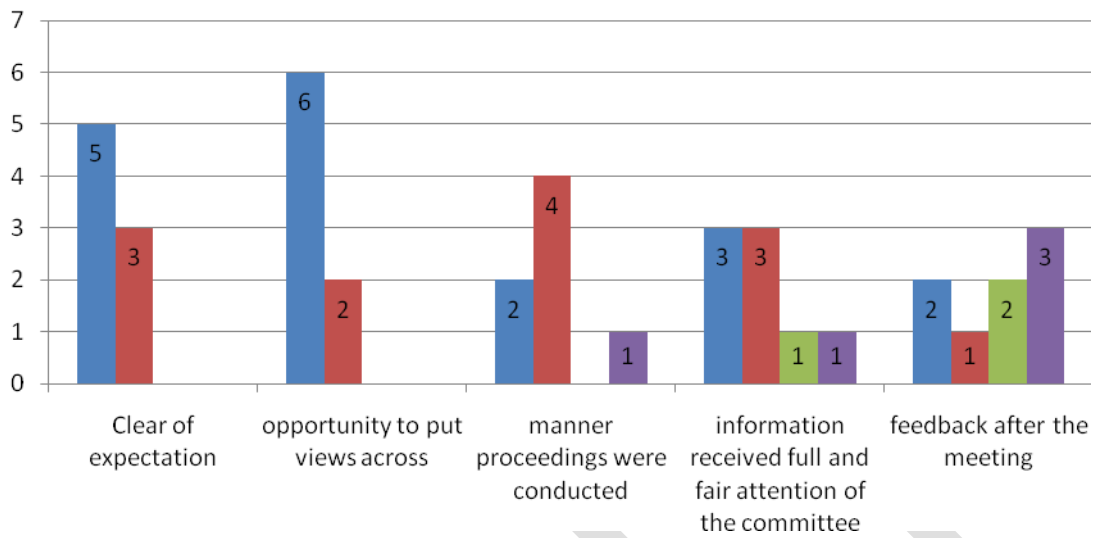
Headline results from the officers and local organisations 2008

Experience of the committee process

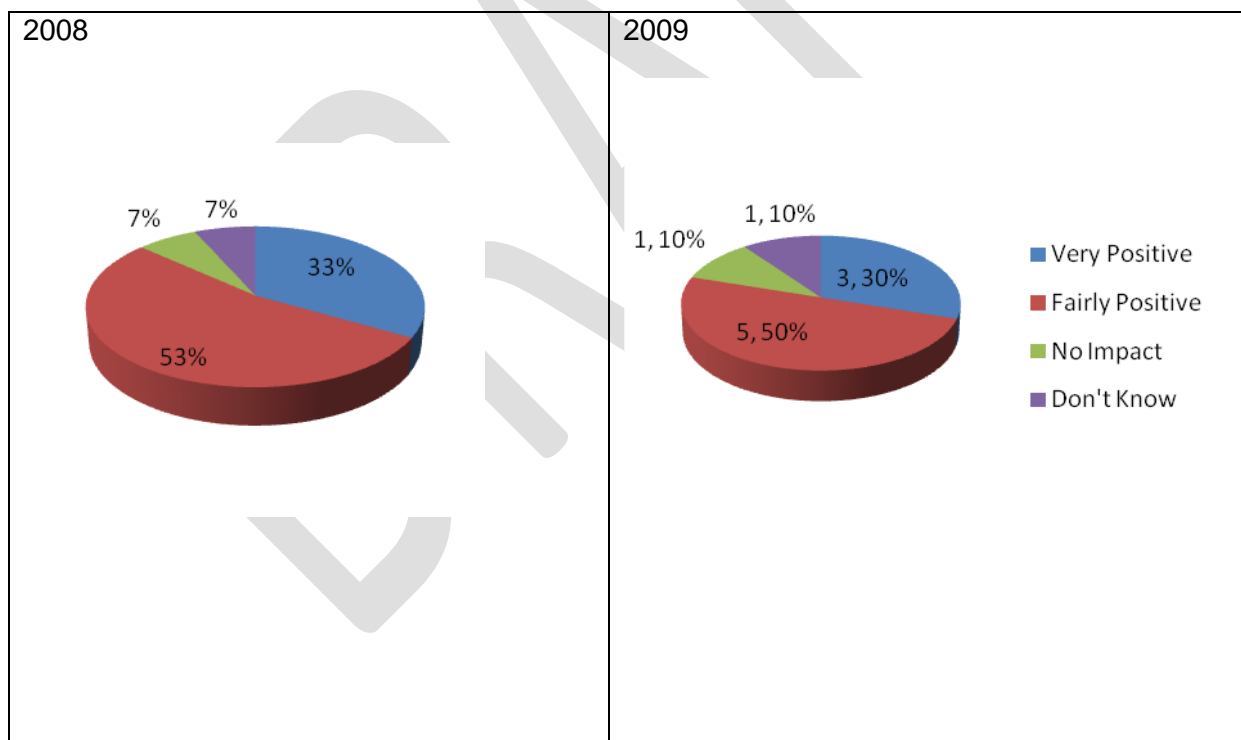


Headline results from the officers and local organisations survey 2009

Experience of the committee process



Impact of scrutiny to the aims of your directorate/ organisation



Comments

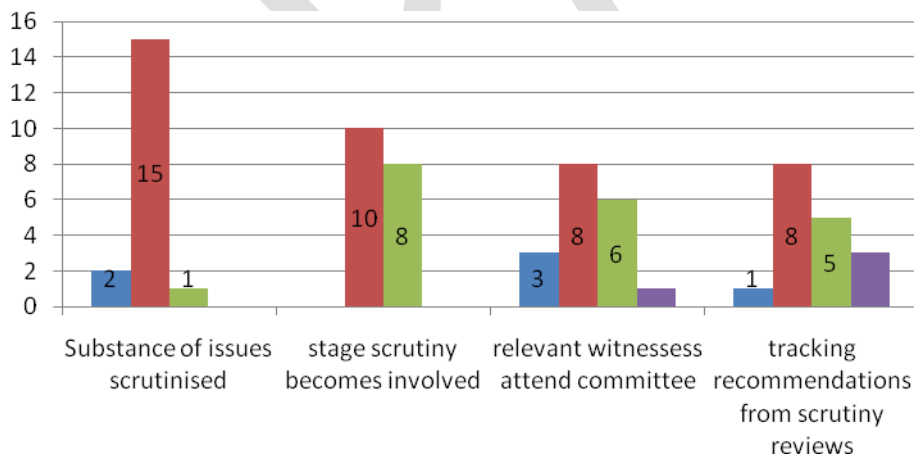
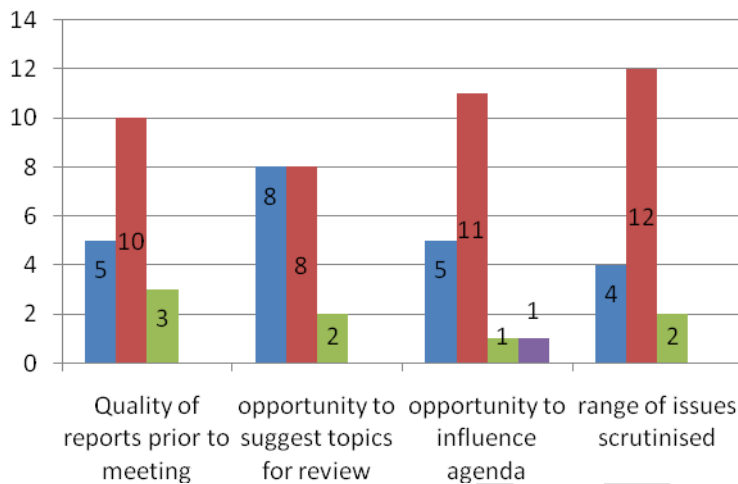
The results demonstrate that there are high levels of satisfaction among officers and local organisations with the overview and scrutiny process which has remained consistent over the year. An area for development is to ensure that attendees receive adequate feedback after the meeting.

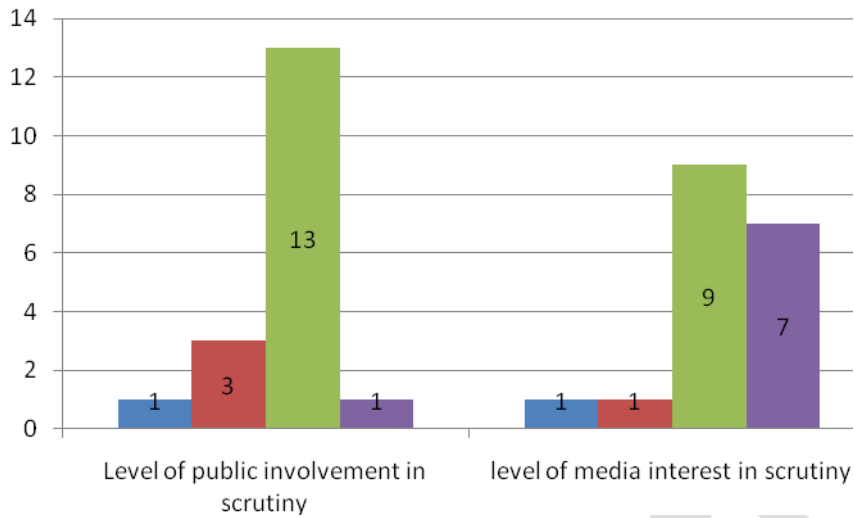
Results from the Members and Co-optees questionnaire

In 2008 this survey was distributed via email or post to all councillors and co-opted members that have been involved in scrutiny. The survey was distributed to 63 Brent Councillors and 12 co-optees on the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. A total of 20 questionnaires were returned giving an overall response rate of 26%. In 2009, 20 questionnaires were also returned.

Headline results from the members and co-optees questionnaire 2008

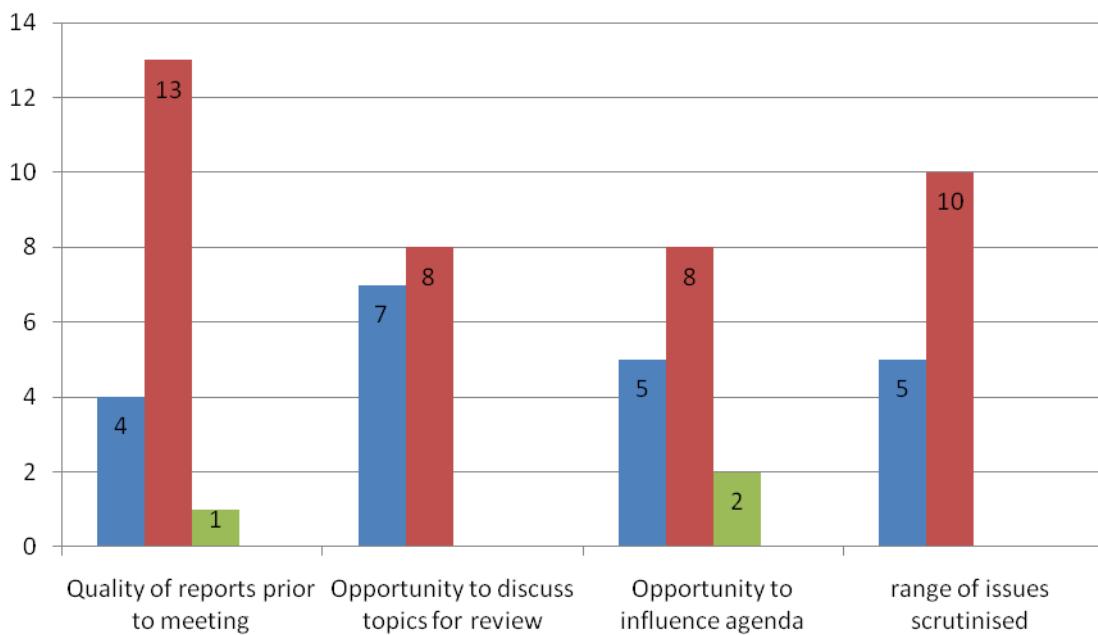
Experience at committee meetings

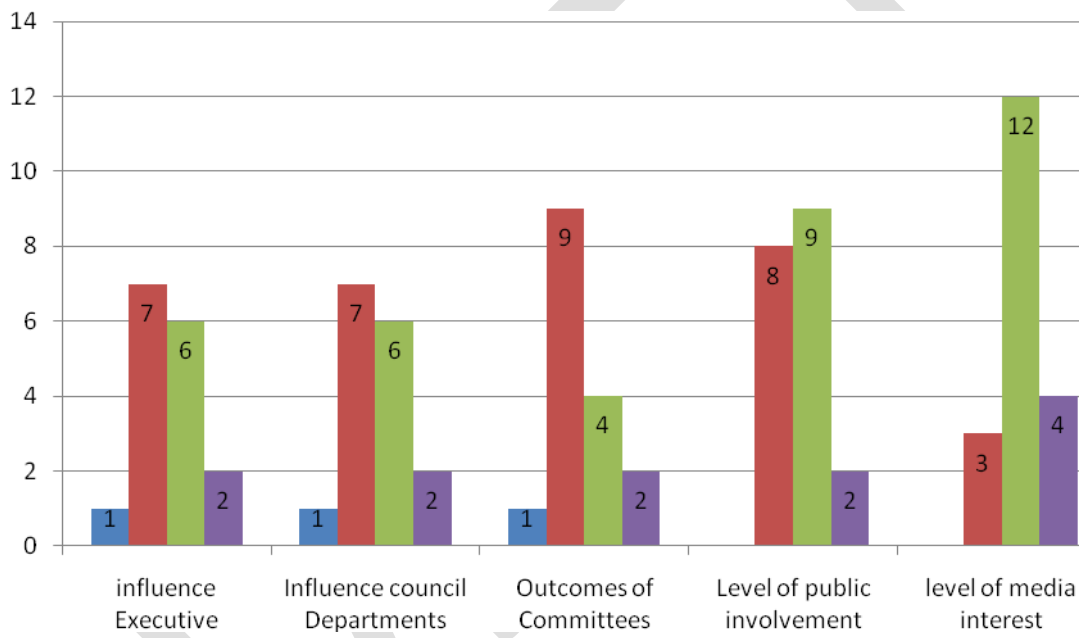
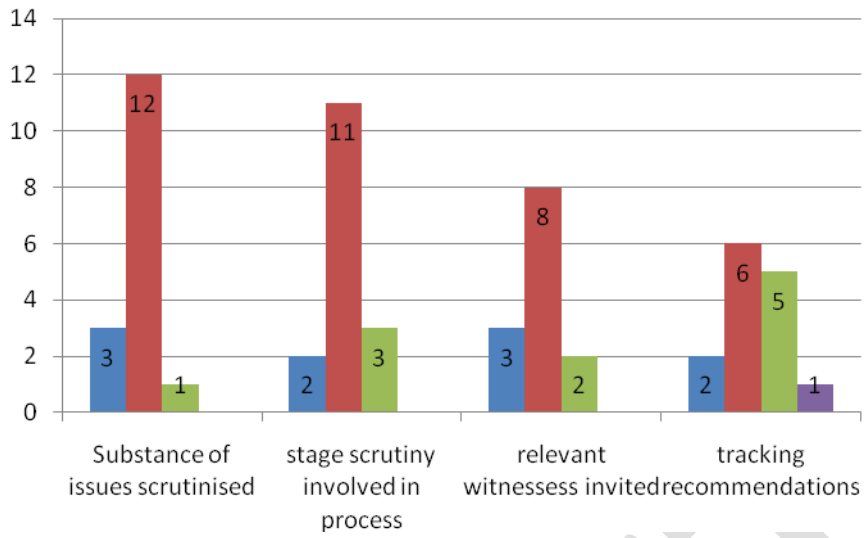




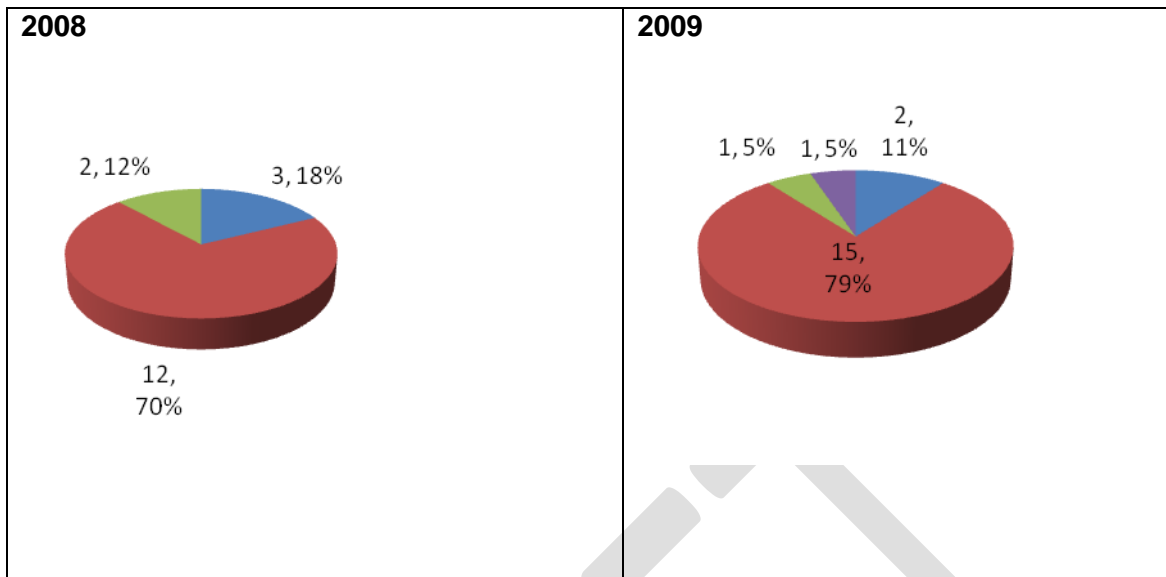
Headline results from the members and co-optees questionnaire 2009

Experience at committee meetings





Do you feel overview and scrutiny adds value to the services it reviews?



Overall the survey demonstrates a high level of satisfaction with the overview and scrutiny process and once again results over the year have remained fairly consistent. However there are particular concerns around:

- The involvement of the Executive in attending overview and scrutiny meetings
- Public involvement in overview and scrutiny
- Raising the profile of overview and scrutiny in the local media
- Scrutiny's ability to influence the Executive and council departments

All these concerns have been recognised and are addressed in the issues for development section.

Overview and scrutiny in Brent – Building on our success

In 2007/8 the annual report set out some key challenges that the function would need to address in the year ahead. This section sets out the progress made in these areas.

Recommendation Tracking

Ensuring that recommendations made in task groups are monitored through to implementation is essential for measuring scrutiny's ability to have real impact on local services. In 2007 a more formal method of tracking recommendations was agreed. Following the agreement of a report by the Executive, the relevant committee will receive a six month and one year update of the process of implementing the recommendations. This has been working well across the committees and is proving an effective way of ensuring that recommendations agreed by the Executive are implemented by service areas and partners. Our ability to track recommendations will be enhanced over the next year with the use of performance management software.

Closer working between scrutiny committees

Last year we recognised the need to ensure that the six overview and scrutiny committees worked together to make the link between different parts of the scrutiny process. To ensure that this happened a meeting of scrutiny chairs has been established to talk about key issues and work programmes. This meeting takes place on an ad hoc basis.

Responding to the Local Government and Public Involvement and Health Act

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act received royal assent in 2007. The Act contained the following important elements for overview and scrutiny functions:

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

The following actions have been taken to ensure that the provisions within the Act are implemented:

- A Councillor Call for Action protocol has been developed in consultation with relevant departments in the council. The protocol clearly defines councillor call for action and sets out the process for its use in Brent.
- The Health Select Committee has considered a number of reports on developing the new LINK and will continue to work closely with the organisation in future. A protocol for dealing with referrals from the LINK has been agreed.
- A briefing on provisions within the Act went to each of the committees who are making use of its provisions.

Relationship with the council's Executive

During 2007/08, concerns were raised about the relationship that overview and scrutiny has with the council's Executive. There were particular concerns about difficulty in getting Executive members to attend some committee meetings and that a task group report is likely to be noted rather than specific agreement given for each of the recommendations. To

address this we are developing a protocol for the working relationship between the Executive and overview and scrutiny. It will address member's attendance at overview and scrutiny and Executive response to overview and scrutiny task group reports.

Programme of Training and Development for Members

Last year we identified the need to develop a programme of training for overview and scrutiny councillors. The training sessions undertaken in 2008/9 are set out at the back of this report.

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Issues for development in 2009/10

Overview and scrutiny contribution to Comprehensive Area Assessment

From April 2009, the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) was introduced as part of the performance framework through which Brent Council and its partners will be assessed. CAA will focus on local priorities and outcomes by looking at how well public services are being delivered and how likely they are to improve. In addition to an area assessment there will also be an organisational assessment of the council and other main public bodies in the area, such as the police and NHS Brent.

Under the new 'Duty to Involve' councils will also need to demonstrate how they have engaged and involved local communities in delivering services that meet their needs. Overview and scrutiny has an important role in this process, both through ensuring that concerns raised through the CAA process inform scrutiny work programmes and that scrutiny task group reviews provide a focus for community engagement.

To fulfil our role in CAA we will need to ensure committees continue to provide a 'critical friend' challenge to the council and local partners to meet the targets set in the LAA, continue to scrutinise the Local Strategic Partnership and ensure that scrutiny reviews conduct a robust consultation with local stakeholders and develop innovative solutions to complex social problems.

Public and media involvement in overview and scrutiny

Good scrutiny should reflect the concerns of the public and ensure that local people have the opportunity to suggest topics for scrutiny reviews, attend committee meetings and contribute to task groups. Our engagement with both the public and the local media has improved over the last year and a number of successes are worth highlighting:

- Scrutiny task groups on services for women existing prostitution, access to health sites and improving outcomes for under achieving groups all featured in the local press
- Committees are developing new ways of engaging with local communities through visits to local facilities and holding meetings outside of the town hall.
- The overview and scrutiny web pages have been revamped. Each of the committees has its own web page and updated information including work programmes are added to the site regularly.
- The Chair of the Health Select Committee hosted a stall at the Local Democracy Week fair. Members of the public suggested some areas for scrutiny to look at which were considered as part of the overview and scrutiny work programme.
- A new overview and scrutiny leaflet for witnesses has been produced. This provides information about the function, what to expect at meetings and invites people to suggest topics for scrutiny to consider.
- There is a quarterly newsletter called *Spotlight* which highlights the work of the committees and the role of members in their scrutiny role.

However this is an area that needs further improvement, as highlighted in our annual evaluation. This year we will seek to raise the profile of overview and scrutiny by broadening the circulation of *Spotlight*, writing articles on scrutiny activities for the Brent Magazine and other publications and ensuring that information on overview and scrutiny is available at events in the borough such as the Respect Festival. We will also continue to develop innovative ways to involve local people in our task group work.

Council Transformation process

Last year the council embarked on an ambitious programme to bring wide scale transformation of all services within the council to modernise and improve services as well as realise efficiencies. A new team has been brought together to conduct a rolling programme of service reviews. Over the next year overview and scrutiny will pay close attention to this process, scrutinising the proposals of the reviews and making recommendations where necessary. Scrutiny is well placed to ensure that frontline councillors have a key input into the process, bringing their knowledge and understanding of local communities ensuring that re-configured services provide the best outcomes for local people.

Training and Development after local elections

In 2010 local government elections are due to take place in London. This is likely to mean that there will be some councillors who will be new to overview and scrutiny and possibly to local government. It is important that high quality training and support is provided to these councillors to help them carry out their role. We will need to ensure that training needs around overview and scrutiny are strongly reflected in training and development plans.

Overview and scrutiny and Performance Plus

Performance Plus is the council's performance management software. It is used by service areas across the council to record information against their local and national performance indicators. This tool will be useful for tracking the process of implementing recommendations from overview and scrutiny task groups. It is important that we begin to do this once recommendations have been agreed by the Executive.

Members Training and Development 2008/9

Date	Type of training	Details
21 st July 2008	Developing scrutiny in Brent	This session was delivered by an associate of the Centre for Public Scrutiny and covered the new legislative context for scrutiny and developing skills within the four principles of effective scrutiny as developed by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.
12 November 2008	Training for scrutiny chairs	The session was held for overview and scrutiny and select committee chairs who currently chair meetings in formal and informal settings and would like to improve their skills.
23 rd March 2009	Questioning Skills	At the training event held in July 2008, members agreed that a training session aimed at enhancing questioning skills would be welcomed. This session was aimed at any member who would like to improve their questioning skills, but would be particularly useful to members of overview and scrutiny committees and those wishing to take part in scrutiny task groups.
Monday 20 April	Comprehensive Area Assessment and Member involvement	This session was led by the Assistant Director for Corporate Policy and set out the key principles of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and the implications for councillors and overview and scrutiny.

How to get involved in overview and scrutiny in Brent

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

By post:

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

By email:

scrutiny@brent.gov.uk

Further information about the work of overview and scrutiny including task group reviews can be found on the Brent Council website.

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