



Brent

Full Council
8 December 2014

**Report from the Assistant Chief
Executive**

For Action

Wards Affected:
ALL

Report from the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee

1.0 Summary

1.1 This report provides a summary of the work of the council's Scrutiny Committee in accordance with Standing Order 14. It covers the period September to November 2014. During this period the Scrutiny Committee has been focused on consolidating the role of the Scrutiny Committee, further developing their work programme and taking forward four time limited task groups.

2.0 Detail

2.1 The Scrutiny Committee has formally met on four occasions during the period September to the end of November 2014. Members of the committee have also met informally to discuss the future work programme of the Committee and agree priorities. They have also attended two Member development sessions on questioning skills and scoping effective task groups.

2.2 The Chair and members of the Scrutiny Committee have represented the Council on the West London Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which is currently addressing the impact of the 'Shaping a Healthier Future' proposals across the sub-region. The Chair of the Committee is a member of the London Scrutiny Chairs Network and via the networks has contributed to developing their package to Member training and development events. The Network has held discussions on approaches to budget scrutiny used by London boroughs as part of sharing best practice.

Scrutiny Committee Meetings.

2.3 The Scrutiny Committee has met on four occasions during this period. These meetings considered a range of issues in relation to both Council services and those of partner agencies. Following the inspection published in August 2014 by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) of North West London Hospitals Trust, the Scrutiny Committee has twice requested that the Trust and the Clinical Commission Group report back on the actions they are taking to implement the recommendations. The CQC findings highlighted a number of areas, particularly

A&E services and maternity care at Northwick Park which required improvement. Following the closure of the A&E facilities at Central Middlesex the performance at Northwick Park A&E has declined further. The Scrutiny Committee at the time of the closure sought reassurance from health partners that all mitigating actions were in place to enable the closure to go ahead safely, without reduction in service quality to Brent residents. Prior to the closure of the Central Middlesex facility members of the Scrutiny Committee made a site visit to the current A&E Unit at Northwick Park. As part of the site visit they spoke to senior staff and nursing staff within the A&E unit. A second site visit by Scrutiny members has since been made to the new, as yet not operational A&E unit at Northwick Park Hospital.

- 2.4 The Committee has continued to question NWLHT on their plans to improve waiting times, ensure adequate staffing and increase the bed capacity at Northwick Park Hospital. The most recent attendance of the Trust was at the Scrutiny meeting held on 26th November 2014.
- 2.5 The Scrutiny Committee have commented on a number of the key strategies currently being development by the council and included items on their agenda covering:-
- Draft School Places Strategy.
 - Draft Employment, Skills and Enterprise Strategy.
 - Response to the impact of the housing benefit cap in Brent.
- 2.6 In response to concerns raised by residents, the Committee requested that the Lead Member for Environment and the Strategic Director attend the September meeting to discuss the new Parking service and visitor permits. The Committee commented on the long call waiting times at the call centre and also older residents' concerns about how to obtain 'virtual' visitor permits. Council policy in this area has since been up-dated to reflect a number of the issues raised by both residents and Members of the Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.7 The October meeting of the Committee received the annual report from the independent Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

A copy of the Scrutiny Forward plan is attached (Appendix 1)

Task Group activity

- 2.8 The Scrutiny Committee has established four time limited task groups during the period. These are looking at:-
- Promoting Electoral Engagement – ensuring residents register to vote following the introduction of Individual Voter Registration.
 - Use of the Pupil Premium – best practice in supporting educational attainment through use of pupil premium funding.
 - Budget Scrutiny task group.
 - Access to GP services and primary care under the Shaping a Healthier Future proposals.

- 2.9 The aim of the Promoting Electoral Engagement task group has been to develop proposals to ensure that all of Brent's residents are successfully transferred onto the new electoral roll. As such, the task group's key outcomes have been:
- To develop a clear and coherent communication strategy for promoting electoral engagement in the borough, with a particular focus on under-represented groups using data to better target engagement;
 - Ensure that the Council and elected members are working with local communities around civic participation and voter registration
 - Harness the expertise of local CVS organisations to reach out to residents;
 - Ensure that most people in the borough are successfully transferred to the new system with a target rate of 95%.
- 2.10 The task group produced an interim report which was positively received by the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 11th November 2014. Following comments from Scrutiny members, the final report of the electoral engagement task group was indorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on 26th November and will now be referred to the Cabinet in the New Year.
- 2.11 To date the task group looking at the use of the pupil premium has been focusing on gathering the national, regional and local picture on the effective use of pupil premium. Firstly meeting with the Director of Brent's Education and Early years; the group has also met with the leading Government and Non Government organisations such as Department for Education (DfE), Achievement for All and the Education Endowment Foundation. The group is due to meet with Ofsted, The Brent partnership and The Brent Schools Forum over the next few weeks.
- 2.12 Using information provided by the DfE the task group met with the Director of Education at LB Lambeth to look at examples of good practise and have meetings provisionally booked with LB Hackney and LB Lewisham. The next step of the task group's work is to visit a sample group of Brent schools and to consult with Brent stakeholders. There are discussion meetings set up with Brent School Governors, Parent groups and the Brent Youth Parliament which will take place during December. A sample group of 10 Brent Primary and Secondary Schools will be visited before the Christmas break, the task group will be speaking to Teaching staff, governor and children from each of these schools.
- 2.13 The Budget task group has held a series of meetings with Strategic Directors and Finance. These meetings have focused on the current budget and service pressures affecting departments and the consequences of the increase in population and demand. They have discussed the potential opportunities for collaborative working to reduce costs and ways to increase income levels. The task group has received an update on the One Council programme and the approach to realising savings through transformational change projects. Following the publication of the council's budget the task group will be meeting in December and will make a report back to the February 2014 meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.14 The health task group on access to GP services is in its early stages and has agreed the scope. So far it has held discussions with Brent Clinical

Commissioning Group on their strategic approach to developing GP Hubs and networks and has also heard from a number of Brent GP's on their experiences.

2.15 The next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee will take place on 6th January 2014 when the committee will be considering the work of the Safer Brent Partnership with regard to community safety in the borough.

BEN SPINKS
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