	Budget Panel 15th September 2010 **Report from the Director of Communication and Diversity**
For Action	Wards Affected: ALL
Developing a Lobbying Plan for Brent	

1.0 Summary

1.1 The Budget Panel has requested information about how Brent Council is developing a plan to provide a strategic focus to the council's lobbying activity.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That members comment on the development of a Lobbying Plan for Brent.

3.0 Detail

3.1 At its last meeting on 13th July 2010 the Budget Panel requested further information about how the council is developing a strategic approach to lobbying government on policy and budgetary changes.

3.2 In the current economic environment it is crucial that the council has a co-ordinated approach to lobbying government on policy areas that have a negative impact on the borough and the council's ability to set a realistic and robust budget. The development of a lobbying plan will provide a more structured approach and enable the council to make best use of its contacts with government and local government organisations such as London Council's and the Local Government Association to maximise the impact of our efforts.

3.3 The national policy landscape is changing rapidly. It is therefore key that the council quickly identifies the issues on which it intends to lobby.

Immediate lobbying priorities

3.3. ***Population estimates and council funding*** – The Office of National Statistics has revised Brent's estimated population down to 254,000, which will affect the amount of funding we receive from central government. A new funding formula will come into effect from 2011/12 which will use the ONS population estimates to allocate resources and so it is crucial that the council lobbies on this issue as soon as possible in order to influence decisions on funding allocations before it is too late. The council believes that Brent's actual population is nearer 290,000 (based on independent research, rising applications for school places, the registered GP population etc) so the impact on funding because of the gap between the two figures could be significant. Ethnicity information has also been removed from the funding formula, which is to Brent's disadvantage.

3.4 ***School places in Brent*** – The shortage of school places in Brent is linked to the population estimates issue. Brent has a shortage of school places at primary school entry level (as of the 9 July, there were 250 resident children unplaced with 65 vacancies in the reception age group). In Brent secondary schools the situation is not much better. The only school with vacancies at all age groups is Cardinal Hinsley. Crest Boys Academy also has vacancies in years 7 and 8. In order to resolve the school places issue Brent needs the necessary funding to provide more forms of entry in existing schools and also to build new primary schools. The Ark Academy will ease the situation regarding shortages in secondary schools, but if the population continues to increase, as we believe it will, this will only provide a temporary solution.

3.5 ***Building Schools for the Future / Academies*** – The government has scrapped the Building Schools for the Future programme, which was to fund the re-building of a number of Brent secondary schools. The impact of this decision will mean that many pupils in Brent will continue to be taught in sub-standard classrooms. While the council has been successful in securing funding for the re-build of the Crest Academies it is imperative that we should lobby central government on the BSF decisions to see if there is any way this can be overturned and continue to press for funding for further redevelopment of our schools.

3.6 ***Housing Benefit*** – The government intends to cap housing benefit payments at £400 per week for a house with four bedrooms or more. The impact of this in Brent could mean that people currently receiving housing benefit and living in a family property may be forced to move out because they can no longer afford the rent. In simple terms this could lead to an increase in homelessness applications and in overcrowding as families downsize to smaller properties with cheaper rents. In Brent, people on housing benefit are likely to be forced out of the private rented sector in the south of the borough and seek cheaper accommodation in the north of Brent, or out of London altogether.

Longer Term Issues

3.7 ***GPs and Health Services in Brent*** – The government is reorganising the way that health services are commissioned and giving local government a greater role in the provision of health services, notably public health. The council will need to work with local GP commissioners to ensure the needs of local people are met. The council will also have a strategic overview of health commissioning in the borough and it needs to assert its influence at an early stage. Work with GPs should begin at an early stage to build relationships and potentially to offer our services as a commissioning support organisation.

3.8 ***Local Government Finance*** – Issues to lobby on include the system of local government finance and the settlement received by Brent (linked to population estimates above).

3.9 ***Adult Social Care*** – There are a number of issues of concern relating to adult social care:

(i). Changes to the eligibility criteria for services, meaning that councils could potentially have to provide services to a greater number of people without an increase in funding to do this.
(ii). A reduction in real term funding, but eligibility criteria remaining the same.
(iii). Longer term issues, such as funding for long term care and the overlap between health and social care services, which can lead to cost disputes between organisations.

3.10 ***Regeneration, housing and employment*** – Brent has ambitious aims for regenerating parts of the borough, but it is operating in an environment where securing private sector funding for such projects is becoming increasingly difficult. Ensuring the correct government departments are lobbied to make Brent's case for funding regeneration projects will be of paramount importance.

Approaches to Lobbying

3.12 Work has started on establishing a more robust joined up approach to lobbying with officers working in Policy and Regeneration and Communications and Diversity working to ensure a council-wide approach is taken. This will include continuing to work with local government organisations such as London Councils and the Local Government Association that provide a collective voice for local government and have long established links with government departments.

3.11 In addition Brent Council will need to be strong in its individual lobbying activities and identifying the right people to lobby is key to achieving any success. Among those who will be lobbied are:

- Minsters – departments including CLG, Education, Work and Pensions, Treasury, Home Office, Health.

- Private offices in the government departments – we need to take advantage of relationships with political advisers, especially to the Liberal Democrat ministers where we are more likely to have those contacts.

- Civil servants and officials – This is particularly the case in organisations such as ONS, but also on local government funding issues.

- Local MPs – particularly on areas of ministerial responsibilities or where departmental connections are established

- Mayor of London / TfL – on transport and regeneration issues.

3.12 Attracting these people to Brent to see the potential impact of emerging policy is viewed as one of the main ways we can maximise our impact. Senior officers will work with lead members to identify suitable events such as the opening of the ARK Academy.

3.13 Lobbying activities can be undertaken by lead officers and lead members together, cross party groups of councillors working together and individual councillors. We will be work to identify key messages and opportunities for councillors to engage with and are discussing how we will put in place opportunities to update councillors on progress and actions they can engage with.

3.14 It is imperative that lobbying activity is informed early to ensure it is relative and timely. To this end we are proposing that 'Lobbying' becomes a regular agenda item for the Corporate Management Team meeting, to engage directly with the council's senior management team and receive timely and appropriate guidance on lobbying activities.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 None

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 None

6.0 Diversity Implications

6.1 None

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

7.1 None

Background Papers

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