

Resource and Public Realm Scrutiny Committee

Chair's Report – April 2019

By Cllr Matt Kelcher

a) Parliamentary visit

On Monday 25th March a delegation from our committee took advantage of a special opportunity to go behind the scenes at a Westminster select committee.

I organised the trip so we could learn more about the work of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Housing, Communities and Local Government. Our two committees perform similar roles in overseeing and scrutinising the work of the government, or the council cabinet.

The delegation spent time with Committee Clerks and Researchers to learn about how they gather evidence for their investigations. We also had a private Q and A session with the experienced and knowledgeable Chair of the Committee, and former Leader of Sheffield City Council, Clive Betts MP. We picked his brains about effective questioning, following up on recommendations and involving the public in evidence gathering.

We then sat in on the meeting of the full committee which included a questioning session with representatives from the LGA, and the Secretary of State for Local Government, James Brokenshire. These questions focused on what the government is doing to help local government prepare for Brexit. I was pleased to hear that there was much support for devolving more power to councils after the process of Brexit is complete ("don't replace Brussels with Whitehall" was the sentiment expressed by one council leader), but also some deeply disturbing stories about the precautions councils near to transport hubs are having to take in case of severe delays following a "no deal" Brexit.

There are a lot of similarities between the work of a Parliamentary Select Committee, and it was great to share ideas and best practice. We certainly learned some new techniques we will bring back to Brent. We have sent official letters of thanks to the officials, and Clive Betts MP, for being so generous with their time and helpful with their answers.



The above picture shows the delegation (l-r Cllr Saqib Butt, Cllr Robert Johnson, Cllr Erica Gbajumo, Cllr Neil Nerva, Cllr Matt Kelcher) in the committee room with the select committee chair, Clive Betts MP (seated).

b) This month's topics

Economic impact of Wembley

Wembley stadium is the most recognisable landmark in our borough, and also the jewel in our crown. However, the presence of a national stadium, and one of the most famous venues in the world, inevitably has an impact on our residents, economy and environment.

When the new stadium was built, one of the conditions placed upon the owners of the stadium - the FA - was that they needed to analyse the impact of their activities on the local area. The FA commissioned the respected accountancy firm Deloitte to produce this report. The most recent iteration was published earlier this year.

This is a really important report and so at the start of tonight's meeting we will be calling witnesses from the FA and Deloitte to give evidence. I think it will be of much public interest and I have encouraged members from the wards around the stadium to attend and participate.

Illegal rubbish dumping

The next item we will be examining tonight is a report on actions the council can take to help combat the problem of illegal dumping of rubbish on non-council land.

We all know that when rubbish is dumped on the highway it is the council's responsibility to collect it, particularly when reported through the Cleaner Brent App.

However, it is more difficult to say what we should do about illegal rubbish dumped on private land. It is not our legal responsibility to collect it, but clearly allowing waste to pile up in view of the public could encourage further dumping.

This is one of those issues that I believe people define as "wicked problems", but scrutiny should not shy away from tough issues and I'm interested to hear what people have to say on the night.

In addition, this paper will include a review of options for mattress-tagging in the private rented sector. This was an idea I proposed in a previous chair's report, and it garnered quite a bit of interest in the local media – as you can see [here](#) and [here](#). It will be interesting to see what progress has been made on this idea.

Parking and electric car charging

The final item we will look at in April – and in the 2018/19 municipal year as a whole – is a report on progress with council plans to create and enable more electric car charging points.

The committee will also investigate how the parking regime can free up more space on roads by restricting vehicle lengths.

At the time of writing the council have just embarked on the process of installing a range of new types of charging points in Brent, including from lamp posts on the pavement, to help provide the options people need. I am organising a visit for the committee to one of these new sites to help us understand how they work ahead of the meeting.

Call in

At the end of March, I received notification that a valid call-in had been tabled by the prerequisite number of backbenchers, regarding the development at the Granville Site. A special meeting was convened to hear this on Wednesday 3 April.

At the time of writing, this meeting has not yet taken place. However, I have received an unprecedented number of request to speak from members of the public, demonstrating this is an issue of significant public concern.

I know that the committee will approach the topic with an open mind and make a fair determination.