



HARROW BUSINESS CONSULTATIVE PANEL TUESDAY 24 JULY 2007

SUPPLEMENTAL PANEL AGENDA (ADVISORY)

AGENDA - PART I

- Enc. 10. **Business Engagement:** (Pages 1 - 6)
Report of the Director of Planning, Development and Enterprise.

AGENDA - PART II - NIL

Note: In accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the following agenda item has been admitted late to the agenda by virtue of the special circumstances and urgency detailed below:-

<u>Agenda item</u>	<u>Special Circumstances/Grounds for Urgency</u>
10. Business Engagement	This report was not available at the time the agenda was printed and circulated. Members are requested to consider this item, as a matter of urgency.

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Meeting:	Business Consultative Panel
Date:	24 July 2007
Subject:	Business Engagement
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Graham Jones Director Planning, Development and Enterprise
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Marilyn Ashton Planning and Enterprise
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Appendix 1

Section 1: Summary

Decision Required

To recommend to Cabinet that the proposal from Harrow in Business to plan and implement a series of business focussed events in partnership with the Council and others is accepted.

Reason for report

Review of the operation of the Business Consultative Panel in order to improve the level of business engagement with the Council.

Risks

Meetings remain poorly attended	Increase marketing activity
Fewer businesses become involved in Council initiatives	See above and ensure information is presented appropriately
Events become costly	Seek sponsorship
Too many initiatives vying for business attention	Manage the process

Section 2: Report

2.1 Background

The Business Consultative Panel was established to take over the role of the National Non-Domestic Ratepayers Consultative Forum, in 2005.

The terms of reference were agreed by Cabinet in May 2005 and are set out below.

a) To enable consultation between the Council and representatives of local non domestic ratepayers required by Section 65 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and to provide information regarding the Council's expenditure proposals for the future budget in accordance with Non-Domestic Ratepayers (Consultation) Regulations 1992. The minutes of the meetings to be reported to Cabinet.

b) To facilitate consultation between the Council and representatives of the business community as required by the Authority.

This report focuses on the panel's role in terms of B.

Several services would benefit from greater consultation with businesses across Harrow e.g.

- Enforcement and regulatory services
- Crime Reduction
- Business rates
- Procurement and the Business Portal
- Master Planning the town centre
- Tourism
- Implementation of the Economic Development Strategy which focuses on Enterprise
- Development of a Business Improvement District in the Town Centre
- The development of incubator provision to help business start ups
- Education links for vocational training, schools and work experience in particular
- Liaison on skills, training and employment initiatives

One of the major drivers for increasing business engagement is the new corporate plan priority “Encourage, promote and retain business.”

Despite best efforts, attendance at the BCP meetings has been poor. A report on engaging the business community and the format of future meetings was presented to the February 2007 meeting of the group.

The attached appendix 1 is a proposal from Harrow in Business as to how future meetings should be organised and run to engage and involve businesses to benefit both the Council and the business community.

Whilst officers would like to recommend that this proposal is accepted and implemented however the following issues need to be discussed and a view agreed in order that the proposal can be accepted and then implemented:-

The annual February NNDR consultation meeting would still need to take place as this is a statutory meeting, but it might form part of larger event.

Harrow in Business via The Business Connection will need to charge the businesses who attend to cover the costs of putting on professional events.

The Council contribution would need to be in kind and permission would need to be sought for use of Council Premises e.g. the Council Chamber and or the Members Lounge without payment.

Harrow Council officers would need to be involved in event planning/delivery as every event must be developed to provide:

- opportunities for feedback on existing Harrow Council services and initiatives
- raise awareness of new initiatives and or changes to regulations.
- increase business involvement in initiatives, services and projects
- opportunities for business to business networking

It is suggested that a draft plan for the year’s events are circulated to partner and council departments making sure that the views of the Small Business Federation and North West London Chamber of Commerce are included.

Section 3 – Statutory Officer Clearance

On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer Date: 16 July 2007	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sheela Thakrar
On behalf of the Monitoring Officer Date: 17 July 2007	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Adekunle Amisu

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Appendix 1

Business Engagement

With an economy driven by a diverse, entrepreneurial and predominantly small business base it is not surprising that Harrow Council experiences real difficulties in engaging and communicating with its business community.

The importance of the need to engage has been expressed as one of the Conservative administration's election pledges 'Building a better relationship with business' and is one of the themes being taken forward under the corporate priority – Getting Harrow Moving.

As a result of a slight decline in satisfaction with Harrow, from several of the larger corporate businesses and organisations it has already been agreed with the Leader and deputy leader that a small network of the largest employers should be set up to enable direct contact at Leader and CE level.

This approach does not so easily translate to the small business community where there is a predominance of 1-10 employee businesses and it is acknowledged that attending Harrow Council meetings maybe a rather low priority for many businesses who are heavily preoccupied with running their businesses.

Currently Harrow Council is operating under severely constrained financial circumstances and this is likely to continue for at least a further two years.

It also needs to be acknowledged that apart from the statutory consultation meeting on NDDR, that business liaison is one of the few discretionary services, so that any changes to meetings will need to be carried out at nil cost to the Council.

There has already been some discussion as to how meetings might be further changed to increase interest from the business community, holding breakfast meetings, taking meetings to other venues, being an agenda item at an existing business meeting.

This document therefore sets out an alternative approach which will seek to provide an engagement platform and harness opportunities to gain feedback from the business community in their interaction with Harrow Council.

In addition, it will seek to raise awareness of existing services and initiatives and bring together the many networking special interest groups across the Borough.

The Business Connection

The Business Connection, founded in 1993, has successfully operated as a business networking group across North West London for the past 14 years. Its membership has been geared toward supporting individual business owner managers.

The club was initially formed by Harrow in Business but as an organisation run by the members for the members as a peer to peer group thereby extending the levels of self help support available to the business community. At its peak, the club had in excess of 400 members.

More recently, the club has diversified its membership offer with the launch of The Womens Connection approximately 12 months ago. However despite efforts on the part of the management group the overall membership and attendance at monthly meetings has suffered (currently 135) having been diluted by what can only be termed as an explosion in the numbers of new networking groups operating within the boroughs boundaries (32 known local groups) which are increasingly run on commercial lines for benefit of the clubs organisers.

To redress this scenario and ensure the clubs longer term future Harrow in Business has put forward a proposal to take The Business Connection back into its portfolio (A final decision on this was taken at an EGM in June 2007).

The purpose of this is two fold,

1. To reposition the club to increase its appeal (and thereby membership) to a wider market audience.
2. To meet the needs identified by the Local Authority to engage with the business community.

Business Engagement Proposal

Harrow in Business, utilising the known and appropriate brand of “The Business Connection,” will look to provide 4 major business events per year. All based in Harrow these meetings will be geared to be high profile and interactive serving to bring together the local business community.

These events will seek sponsorship and admission income and will be marketed utilising the Harrow in Business client database, The Business Connection membership and the links and influence these organisations across other networking groups and their membership.

Members of recognised business networking groups in Harrow (need to register) will be provided access at a discounted rate (increasing the value of the networking groups to which they belong) on the basis that we reserve the right to notify individuals attending of future up and coming events (both The Business Connection and Harrow in Business).

The 4 events will be drawn from

1. Key note motivational speaker – e.g. John Niland, Nigel Risner, Key Business figures Richard Branson, Simon Woodruffe, Alan Sugar etc Sporting Celebrities (with a business theme)
2. Harrow Council Question Time (utilising the format of the television programme). Specifically a local focus with Local Councillors, Officers, MPS only.
3. West London Business Advice Open Day (ran successfully in 2005)
4. The Harrow Business Debate – Speakers and panellists to include an Economist, CE Harrow Council, Business Leader, LDA, Learning and Skills Council, Government Ministers, MPs etc
5. The Business Challenge – A business competition challenge event, with teams drawn from: Local Entrepreneurs, Large Corporate, Social Entrepreneurs, Local Authority, Local Schools
6. Business Awards Event – This may possibly link into the already established Watford and North West London Business Awards
7. Enterprising Harrow Exhibition – Possible tie into Young Enterprise / Livewire
8. Meet the Buyer Event
9. Chef of the Year Awards / Pub of the Year (re-introduction of a previously held competition) potential to theme to ethnicity – will need input from EHO / Tourism etc).