

**ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY
SUB-COMMITTEE**
11 MARCH 2004

Chair: * Councillor Blann

Councillors:	* Billson (2)	* Lent
	* Mrs Kinnear	* Miles
	* Lavingia	* Janet Mote

* Denotes Member present
(2) Denotes category of Reserve Member

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL
PART II - MINUTES
73. Attendance by Reserve Members:

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Member:-

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor Seymour	Councillor Billson

74. Declarations of Interest:

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members in relation to the business transacted at this meeting.

75. Arrangement of Agenda:

RESOLVED: That (1) Item 13 'Any Other Business' be added to the agenda;
(2) all items be considered with the press and public present.

76. Minutes:

RESOLVED: That (1) the minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2003, having been circulated, be taken as read and agreed;
(2) authority be given to the Chair to sign the minutes as a correct record following the meeting.

77. Public Questions:

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 8.

78. Petitions:

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 9.

79. Deputations:

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 10.

80. Replacement Harrow Unitary Development Plan:

The Sub-Committee received the report of the Chief Planning Officer which outlined the current position in relation to the review of the Harrow Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which was now coming to a conclusion. The report also gave details of the new system of development plans, entitled the Local Development Framework, which was subject to legislation due to be enacted in Summer 2004.

In relation to the UDP, the Chair explained that it was a lengthy document and that the report provided to Members was a synopsis of the main issues arising out of the UDP. The Chair gave an overview of the consultation process, which the Chief Planning Officer elaborated on. The Chair sought confirmation that all the statutory consultation procedures had been adhered to and this was confirmed by the Chief Planning Officer.

The Sub-Committee noted that the process had commenced in 1998 and that over 500 groups and organisations, including Harrow's schools, had an opportunity to comment on and contribute to the plan via public meetings and written responses, etc. Members were informed that the plan has been amended on several occasions as a result of consultation exercises and that the final six weeks of consultation had finished today.

The Chair queried the impact of the Mayor of London's Plan on the UDP. The Chief Planning Officer advised that the Mayor's Plan had been adopted approximately a month ago and that the Council's UDP would need to conform to all aspects of it. The Sub-Committee discussed the repercussions of the UDP not conforming, which Members noted would be costly and time consuming, mainly due to the need to re-embark on the consultation process.

The Vice Chair raised concerns about this process and queried whether the Mayor was authorised to reject the Council's UDP at this late stage. The Chief Planning Officer confirmed that this was within the Mayor's powers and that he had previously raised objections at the deposit stage of the UDP process (February 2003), which led to changes in the UDP but that further objections could be raised at this late stage. Following a discussion, Members agreed that the Sub-Committee's concerns in relation to the UDP be forwarded to Cabinet; specifically that the impact of the Mayor's input into the UDP could have detrimental effects on the Council's Planning Services, particularly in relation to the impact on officers' workloads and the costs involved in re-opening the consultation process.

The Sub-Committee noted that the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill was expected to be enacted in June / July 2004 and discussed the practical implications of this new legislation. The Chief Planning Officer advised that a more in-depth report would be going to the next meeting of the UDP Advisory Panel and that the Sub-Committee would also receive an update on this at its next meeting.

Members discussed how the Sub-Committee could become involved in this process and agreed that there were a number of indicators that could be used to monitor Planning Services' progress. Members also discussed the financial implications of implementing the new legislation. The Chief Planning Officer advised that there was currently no provision for this in the medium-term budget strategy but that the planning delivery grants were yet to be determined and would be reported to Cabinet, Development Control Committee and UDP Advisory Panel in April 2004.

The Sub-Committee discussed the Community Strategy and received advice from the Director of Organisational Performance in relation to how current consultation processes could be enhanced and how links with the Harrow Strategic Partnership and related organisations could be built into the process. Members were informed that it would be beneficial for the Council to have a structured consultation process in place in light of the new legislation and the prospect of re-opening consultation for the UDP / Local Development Framework.

RESOLVED: That (1) Cabinet be requested to consider the Sub-Committee's comments in relation to the Harrow Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and prospective Local Development Framework, specifically "that the impact of the Mayor of London's input into the Council's UDP could have detrimental effects on the Council's Planning Services, particularly in relation to the impact on officers' workloads and the costs involved in re-opening the consultation process";

(2) the report of the Chief Planning Officer be noted;

(3) the Chief Planning Officer be requested to submit a report on the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee.

81. **Best Value Review of Planning Services:**

The Sub-Committee received the report of the Chief Planning Officer which gave details of the Best Value Review of Planning Services undertaken in Autumn 2001 and the report of the Best Value Inspectorate (March 2003). The Chair explained that the reason the Sub-Committee was looking at this now was because a report back to scrutiny on the Best Value Review had been requested in 2001.

Members noted that Planning Services had been assessed as 'fair' (one star) with 'uncertain' prospects for the improvement. The Chief Planning Officer advised Members of progress made on the recommendations arising from the review: -

(i) A five year Best Value Improvement Plan for Planning Services has been implemented;

- (ii) Performance against Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) had improved, which was significant when set against continuing increases in workload (12% increase in the number of planning applications in 2002-03).

The Chief Planning Officer informed Members that despite these improvements, Planning Services had been 'named and shamed' as a 'Planning Standards Authority' by the government and as a result, consultants from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) were coming to review Planning Services in March 2004. Members agreed that the workload per officer needed to be highlighted and addressed as part of this review, as currently each Planning Officer deals with approximately 245 applications per annum compared with the 'norm' of 150.

Members were informed that a three-year action plan would be available in April / May 2004 detailing how Planning Services would be able to meet government targets by 2006-07. The Chief Planning Officer envisaged that there would be resource implications and organisational change as a result of the review by the ODPM.

The Chair requested that Members be able to view the three-year action plan at an early stage.

RESOLVED: That (1) the Chief Planning Officer be requested to submit the approved three-year action plan to the Sub-Committee;

(2) the report of the Chief Planning Officer be noted.

82. **Annual Work Programme 2004-05 and Annual Report 2003-04:**

The Sub-Committee received the report of the Executive Director (Organisational Development) which gave details of the process for the preparation of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's annual report to Council and the role of the Sub-Committees in ensuring that key information regarding their annual workload was included within the report. The report also set out the formulation of the Sub-Committee's work programme for 2004-05.

The Scrutiny Manager highlighted the following aspects of the report: -

- (i) It was recommended that each Sub-Committee only take on one review per annum with a view to effectively targeting the available Member and officer resources for an in-depth prioritised review;
- (ii) it was recommended that the review of a topic should "add value" to the Council's Corporate Priorities and the outcomes thereof;
- (iii) it was recommended that the Centre for Public Scrutiny's (CfPS) four principles of good public scrutiny for effective public scrutineers be adopted;

The Scrutiny Manager also advised that it was important that national imperatives, Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) where the activity falls within the bottom quartile (identified by external auditors as needing greater attention), LPSA targets, Harrow's Vitality Profile and 'hot topics' within the community be taken into account when devising the Sub-Committee's work programme for 2004-05. The Director of Organisational Performance suggested that areas such as transport provision, retention of small businesses and social housing provision could benefit from an in-depth scrutiny review.

Members were also informed that the timing of scrutiny reviews was crucial to their success; the Sub-Committee needed to be involved at the conception of action plans and plan reviews in advance.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport informed Members that the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development, Housing and Best Value and the Executive Director (Urban Living) were unable to attend the meeting due to prior engagements but would be attending the next meeting of the Sub-Committee on 9 June 2004 to answer any questions that Members may have on their service areas.

The Portfolio Holder drew Members' attention to the form circulated by the Interim Head of Environment and Transportation, which was entitled 'Urban Living – Draft Objectives 2004-07', and commented on how some of the issues raised in the document could be incorporated into the Sub-Committee's work programme. The Sub-Committee discussed how legislative changes in relation to the licensing process might affect the Council and whether this was a situation that Members could monitor and contribute to the development of the Council Licensing Policy.

The Director of Professional Services (Urban Living) commented on the draft objectives one by one and highlighted plans and strategies which could benefit from Members' attention, such as: -

- (i) The Roll Out of the New Harrow Project
- (ii) The Local Implementation Plan
- (iii) The Local Development Framework and Planning Services (previously discussed by the Sub-Committee - see Minutes 80 and 81)
- (iv) The Housing Improvement Plan
- (v) The Green Belt Management Policy
- (vi) The Civic Centre Travel Plan
- (vii) The Town Centre's Interim Parking Plan

The Portfolio Holder informed Members that the Council had recently won another national award through the New Harrow Project: ENCAMS had voted the project as the 'Best Environmental Initiative of the Year'. The Portfolio Holder requested that his appreciation of the staff involved in achieving this award be recorded. The Chair seconded this proposal and on behalf of the Sub-Committee, congratulated the staff involved in the project for winning yet another prestigious award. The Chair stated that the award illustrated the commitment of staff and was well deserved.

The Area Director (Urban Living) updated Members on progress made in relation to the New Harrow Project. It was noted that Stage 2 was currently being rolled out and that the Audit Commission would be coming back to review the project in 2005, after Stage 3 had been rolled out. A Member raised concerns that not all parts of the Borough were being catered for under the New Harrow Project and requested that those areas not within Stages 2 or 3 be looked after also. The Member also stated that the appearance of roundabouts within the Borough needed to be addressed and suggested using advertisements on roundabouts to generate revenue. The Portfolio Holder disagreed with the Member in relation to other parts of the Borough being neglected and stated that the awards for the project spoke for themselves.

The Director of Professional Services (Urban Living) also suggested areas which were not included in the draft objectives document, such as the LPSA Targets and tourism. Members discussed the timescales for the above plans and strategies in order to ensure that the Sub-Committee was not constrained in its choice of in-depth reviews. The Director of Professional Services (Urban Living) advised that he would clarify the dates and timescales of the plans and strategies for Members.

The Chair queried whether Members would prefer to agree the work programme for 2004-05 now or to digest the information which had been received and hold a separate Special meeting to agree the work programme. Following advice on timescales from the Scrutiny Manager, the Sub-Committee agreed to hold a Special meeting to discuss and agree the work programme for 2004-05. The Director of Organisational Performance suggested that officers collate information on the areas that would benefit from an in-depth review into one document in time for the Special meeting of the Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED: That (1) a Special meeting be held to: -

- (i) agree the Sub-Committee's work programme for 2004-05;
- (ii) identify a maximum of two potential review topics;
- (iii) nominate Member(s) to liaise with officers in undertaking feasibility studies on any issues identified;

(2) the proposed process for the preparation and publication of the annual report for 2003-04 be agreed;

(3) the report of the Executive Director (Organisational Development) be noted.

83. **Response to the Review of Consultation for the Highway and Transportation Scheme:**

The Sub-Committee received the report of the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport, which was tabled at the meeting. The report provided responses to each issue arising from the review. The Portfolio Holder informed Members that there was nothing within the findings of the review or the recommendations arising out of the review that he did not agree with but that some of the recommendations had significant resource implications, which could not currently be met.

Members noted the following points highlighted by the Portfolio Holder: -

- (i) Some of the recommendations would reduce the number of schemes that could be worked on simultaneously and that it was important to achieve a balance between additional work and benefits received.
- (ii) Where there was confidence that a more streamlined approach was appropriate, several of the four stages of consultation should be combined.
- (iii) More use should be made of exhibitions at Stages 2 and / or 3.
- (iv) More effort should be made to publicise the consultation process, which could be achieved by using the Council's web site, street notices for exhibitions and statutory notices and press releases.
- (v) Greater effort should be made to ensure that consultation documents reach the appropriate business owners.
- (vi) It would be impractical and uneconomical to target all non-responders in an attempt to increase the response rate on all occasions, particularly near the end of the consultation period, as this would mean contacting approximately 80% of premises again.
- (vii) It would be helpful to use a communications advisor to review the language and layout of consultation documents.
- (viii) Wherever practicable, roads just beyond the immediate problem area should be given the opportunity for opting to be included in a proposed Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ).

RESOLVED: That the report of the Portfolio Holder be noted.

84. **Any Other Business:**

Attendance at the Next Meeting of the Sub-Committee

The Chair reminded Members that the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development, Housing and Best Value and the Executive Director (Urban Living) would be attending the next meeting of the Sub-Committee to answer questions from Members on their service areas. It was agreed that Members would forward any questions they may have to the Chair two weeks before the meeting.

"Your Home Your Needs" Best Value Review

The Chair informed Members that this would be discussed at the next meeting of the Sub-Committee and that representatives from the Strengthening Communities and Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committees had been invited to attend the meeting to discuss this item.

LPSA Targets

The Scrutiny Manager informed Members that officers would be giving a presentation on the LPSA Targets at the next meeting of the Sub-Committee and suggested that Members of the Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee be invited to the meeting to discuss this item.

RESOLVED: That (1) Members of the Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee be invited to attend the next meeting of the Sub-Committee to discuss and receive a presentation on the LPSA Targets.

(2) the items raised under any other business be noted.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.35 pm, closed at 9.22 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR ALAN BLANN
Chair