

**STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY
SUB-COMMITTEE****13 JULY 2004**

Chair: * Councillor Thammaiah

Councillors: * Janet Cowan
* Gate
* Lavingia (1)* Omar
* Anjana Patel (3)
* Seymour* Denotes Member present
(1) and (3) Denote category of Reserve Member**PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL****PART II - MINUTES**106. **Appointment of Chair:****RESOLVED:** That the appointment at the Special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 May 2004, under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 11.2, of Councillor Thammaiah as Chair of the Sub-Committee for the Municipal Year 2004/2005, be noted.107. **Attendance by Reserve Members:****RESOLVED:** To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:-Ordinary MemberCouncillor Dharmarajah
Councillor Vina MithaniReserve MemberCouncillor Lavingia
Councillor Anjana Patel108. **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.109. **Arrangement of Agenda:****RESOLVED:** That all items be considered with the press and public present.110. **Appointment of Vice-Chair:****RESOLVED:** That Councillor Seymour be appointed Vice-Chair of the Sub-Committee for the 2004/2005 Municipal Year.111. **Minutes:****RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meetings held on 2 February and 30 March 2004, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as correct records.112. **Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations:****RESOLVED:** To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules 8, 9 and 10 respectively.113. **Community Cohesion:**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Executive Director (Organisational Development).

Members were updated by an officer from the Partnership Unit on the progress on Community Cohesion throughout West London including Harrow. It was explained that following troubles in 2001 in parts of the North, a Government initiative had been established to bring communities together. It was recognised that the riots had been exacerbated by the lack of understanding amongst communities who felt isolated and polarised. The media, public sector and the police had been criticised in the report that followed. The Government-funded Pathfinder programme had been established to set up various community cohesion projects with the aims of moving forward with the Race

Relations (Amendment) Act and promoting good community relations. The officer explained that it was also important to target young people particularly those in disadvantaged areas such as Council estates where some youths may feel isolated.

As part of the Pathfinder programme, Members were invited to participate in a seminar being held on 1 September 2004 at the Civic Centre. The aim was to allow joint working between Members and officers on community cohesion with a particular focus on local Community Strategy objectives.

RESOLVED: That (1) the progress in the Pathfinder Programme be noted; and

(2) the current and planned work in Harrow to ensure that principles of Community Cohesion are being implemented locally, be noted.

114. **Strategic Review of Grants:**

A report of the Director of Financial and Business Strategy was presented to the Scrutiny Sub-Committee on the Strategic Review of Grants.

An officer updated Members on the progress of the ongoing Grants review, the consultation phase of which had been conducted by MORI. The consultation had been in 2 stages. The initial consultation involved responses from the 12 umbrella organisations, and the 2nd stage was extended to over 400 community groups who were in receipt of some form of support from the Council. Areas being addressed were:-

- Concessionary lettings
- Payments direct from departmental budgets
- Free/discounted use of premises
- Discretionary rate relief

Members were informed that there had been a 20% response rate, which was seen as a reasonable return. It was anticipated that the findings would be available towards the latter end of the week following the meeting, and that they would be reported to the Grants Advisory Panel in July and Cabinet in September 2004.

Members agreed that more emphasis should be given to monitoring the performance of the groups against targets set in order to qualify for funding. In addition, it was felt that the Council should offer more support for those who no longer qualified for local authority funding under the new criteria. It was felt that at least community representatives would be able to obtain advice on where funding can be obtained outside the Authority. The Chair requested that the MORI findings be brought to the next meeting of the Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee in September.

RESOLVED: That the officer feedback the comments made by Members of the Sub-Committee to the Grants Advisory Panel, for consideration at the Panel's meeting on 27th July 2004.

115. **Consultation by Post Office Ltd on Proposed Closures in Harrow:**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Executive Director (Organisational Development) outlining proposals for the way forward with regard to the proposed closure of Post Offices in Harrow following consultation by Post Offices Ltd.

An officer outlined the scrutiny review group's findings. Members were presented with three options on how to proceed. The officer suggested that there was sufficient interest to warrant a public consultation, and that the Authority should act upon this during the formal consultation period and incorporate the findings in a written response to Post Office Ltd.

The Sub-Committee agreed with the view that the community should be consulted and their comments incorporated into a response. Members' views were that the Authority should be seen to be acting as a conduit and should exercise community leadership rather than miss the opportunity to contribute to the process. In addition, it was unanimously agreed that the officer should notify all Ward Councillors of the proposed Post Office closures within their Wards, and provide them with relevant information such as maps in advance of the forthcoming 6 week consultation by Post Office Limited.

RESOLVED: That (1) the interim report of the scrutiny review group, including the proposals for the formal consultation by POL in September/October 2004, be adopted; and

(2) the Sub-Committee's findings be forwarded to Cabinet.

116. **Work Programme for the Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee 2004/05:**

The Sub-Committee considered its current work programme for 2004/05.

A Member suggested the Deputy Leader (Partnership and Property Portfolio Holder) should be asked to reserve two of the scheduled dates for meetings of this Sub-Committee in his diary.

The following topics were put forward for the forthcoming meeting on 28 September 2004, and agreed by Members for inclusion in the Sub-Committee's Work Programme for 2004/05.

- Strategic Grant Review – Consultation Response
- Community Cohesion

RESOLVED: That (1) the Deputy Leader (Partnership and Property Portfolio Holder) be invited to attend the meetings of the Sub-Committee on 28 September 2004 and 13 April 2005; and

(2) the Sub-Committee's Work Programme, as amended to include the items outlined above, be noted.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 8.21 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR KEEKIRA THAMMAIAH
Chair