

**ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY  
SUB-COMMITTEE**
**9 JUNE 2004**

Chair: \* Councillor Blann

 Councillors: \* Arnold \* Lavingia  
                   \* Dharmarajah (2) \* Miles  
                   Knowles \* Seymour

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

[Note: Councillor Mrs Kinnear also attended this meeting in a speaking role].

**PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**
**PART II - MINUTES**

 90. **Appointment of Chair:**

**RESOLVED:** To note the appointment at the Special meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 May 2004 (Min 184), under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 11.2, of Councillor Blann as Chair of this Sub-Committee for the 2004/05 Municipal Year.

 91. **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 Lent	Councillor Dharmarajah

 92. **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.

 93. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

**RESOLVED:** That all items be considered with the press and public present.

 94. **Appointment of Vice Chair:**

**RESOLVED:** To appoint Councillor Arnold as Vice-Chair of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Sub-Committee for the 2004/2005 Municipal Year.

 95. **Minutes:**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 11 March 2004, and of the Special meeting held 19 April 2004, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as correct records.

 96. **Public Questions:**

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

 97. **Petitions:**

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

 98. **Deputations:**

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

 99. **Presentation on the LPSA Targets:**

The Director of Organisational Performance introduced a joint presentation with the

Chief Environmental Health Officer and the Waste Management Policy Officer on Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) targets.

The Director of Organisational Performance explained that the Local Public Service Agreement aimed to improve services within the Local Authority to meet public expectations. The agreement focused on a limited amount of services as a more effective approach than an overall strategy to improve services.

The Local Public Service Agreement was between the Government and individual Councils and upon entering the agreement Harrow had selected twelve targets for improvement to be achieved over three years. The targets were a combination of national and local priorities. It was explained that most of the targets could only be achieved in partnership with other agencies such as the Police or Health Services. The Council would be rewarded on a sliding scale if it reached 60% of the targets and if all targets were reached, the Council would receive 2.5% of the Council budget. Quarterly reports on the achievements of the LPSA targets would be issued for Members to monitor the process. It was suggested that a report on LPSA targets could be presented to the Scrutiny Committees on an annual basis.

The Chief Environmental Health Officer (CEHO) explained that five of the Local Public Service Agreement targets were within Urban Living: 'Drug Misuse and Treatment', 'Reduction of Robbery', 'Street Scene', 'Road Safety' and 'Waste and Recycling'. These targets were all interlinked with other national priorities and would allow the Council to fund other necessary schemes through the funding provided for the LPSA. The CEHO advised that the Council had already met some targets set out in the LPSA and was positive that other targets would be met. He informed the meeting that the only target which remained a challenge was 'Waste and Recycling'.

The Chief Environmental Health Officer proceeded with a more detailed presentation of the LPSA targets:

Drug Misuse and Treatment: It was explained that the Local Authority would concentrate on increasing the participation of problematic drug users in drug treatment programmes and provide new services in the Borough where drug users would be automatically referred following an offence. He added that this would be provided through a new treatment centre at Besborough Road and that the facility also met objectives contained in national priorities in relation to tier 2 services and 'Through Care and After Care' provision.

Robbery: The officer circulated an update report outlining the current activities to combat robbery and informed the Sub-Committee that most robberies in Harrow were committed in the proximity of transport centres. The officer reported that there had been a 28% reduction in Youth on Youth street crime and stated that the Council was confident that the introduction of the 'Safer Neighbourhood Scheme' and the soon to be established Police 'Robbery Task Force' would reduce robberies in the Borough.

Street Scene: The officer explained that the LPSA targets referred to the cleanliness of individual streets and that the selected area was South Harrow. He continued explaining that with the 'New Harrow Project', targets had already been met.

Road safety: The officer informed the meeting that the aim was to keep the number of persons killed or seriously injured in road accidents to under 90 incidents per year. He advised that the Council would concentrate on developing improvement to major junctions, intersections and cycle routes and on improving road infrastructure to reduce accidents in identified hotspots by 2005/06.

Waste and recycling: The officer explained that the LPSA targets only related to recycling at the Civic Amenity site and that these targets would be met well before the relevant date. However, he advised that the Borough needed to achieve an overall recycling rate of 25.2% in 2005/06 in order to receive the financial reward and reported that the current recycling rate was 13.2%. The officer stated that a significant improvement was required to achieve the target.

In response to concern voiced by a back benching Councillor present at the meeting, officers confirmed that the Council regularly removed illegal advertising boards.

**RESOLVED:** That the officers' presentation be noted.

100. **Questions to Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development, Housing and Best Value and the Executive Director (Urban Living) Regarding Their Service Areas:**

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development, Housing and Best Value attended the meeting to answer written and verbal questions from the Sub-Committee.

**Housing:** The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development, Housing and Best Value informed the Sub-Committee that there was ongoing work to increase affordable housing by promoting housing development, co-operating with private landlords and encouraging people to move to other Boroughs where more social housing was available. The Portfolio Holder stressed that the Borough had obtained good reviews on their work with the homeless with no families accommodated in Bed and Breakfast and he stated that there would be a review of sheltered accommodation for older people. He advised that rent arrears were decreasing and that new software had been introduced to monitor housing debts more efficiently.

In response to Members' queries regarding the possible non-achievement of the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) two-star rating, the Portfolio Holder explained that six months after the launch of ALMO there would be an inspection and in case of failure, the Council could call for a second inspection while improving the services based on the reports from the first inspection. The Portfolio Holder stressed that the Council had received an encouraging report from the inspection in November and he was confident that a two-star rating would be achieved.

**Planning:** The Portfolio Holder reported that the Replacement Harrow Unitary Development Plan (UDP) would be submitted to Council on 24 June for adoption and could therefore soon be implemented. He advised that the UDP would be replaced by a Local Development Framework (LDF) by 2007.

The Portfolio Holder informed the meeting that the Planning Development Grant for 2004/05 did not include allocation for development control performance since only a minor improvement had been achieved in this area. He advised that the set deadline of eight weeks to determine minor applications was rarely achieved when the Development Control Committee dealt with the applications and he asked the Sub-Committee to note that Members' disagreement with the revisions to delegation process would decrease the Council's possibility of achieving the targets and receiving grants in the future.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development, Housing and Best Value explained that a report on the Green Belt Management Strategy was due to be submitted to Cabinet soon. The report would cover both Council and non-Council land in green belt with considerations on how to manage the land and how to ensure public access to the land.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the planning application fees as a source of funding of the Improvement Plan the Chief Planning Officer replied that grants for planning delivery would be received for a further year before a Government review of the grants. The officer advised that it was likely that Local Authorities would continue to receive grants but it was yet to be determined what form the grants would take. He explained that the Government might increase the fees for planning applications and stated that at present these did not in any way correspond to the costs of processing the applications. The officer continued explaining that the achievement of the Government's targets for planning might well form a condition for increasing the planning application fees.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder for attending and noted that commitment from all Members was important to meet the Government's targets in planning.

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

101. **Review of Waste Management:**

The Waste Management Policy Officer introduced a presentation on Harrow Council's Waste Management.

The officer explained that Harrow's households and businesses generated 100,000 tonnes of waste per year. He reported that 13.2% of waste had been recycled in 2003/04 with a collection cost of £5.5 m per year and a disposal cost of £6m per year.

The officer informed the Sub-Committee that the Green Box recycling scheme covered the whole of the Borough while the Brown Bin Garden Waste scheme was piloted in certain areas. He advised that at Cabinet's meeting on 20 May it had been agreed to expand the Brown Bin Scheme to include kitchen waste and cardboard in order that the

LPSA target of 25.2% of waste being recycled be met. He reported that a pilot scheme of the revised Brown Bin Scheme would start in October with an evaluation report to be submitted to Cabinet in April 2005. The officer explained that the pilot would also trial, in one area, the collection of organic waste once a week instead of fortnightly, since organic waste made up around 50% of the total household waste. He continued explaining that collections of residual waste from the green wheelie bin in this area would be reduced to once a fortnight and this aspect of the pilot would also be evaluated in the report to Cabinet.

He advised that the Council's waste disposal presented various challenges and costs, but although an expansion of the recycling scheme would imply increased costs on a short-term basis, this would prove profitable in the long term. The officer explained that the West London Waste Authority (WLWA) was the statutory authority which charged Harrow for its waste disposal. Biodegradable waste disposed of in landfill sites would be gradually reduced to meet the European Community's directives and Councils requiring additional landfill would face increasing costs; a wide recycling scheme would therefore reduce landfill costs and the levy from the WLWA.

The officer reported that in addition to the recycling scheme, the Council was looking at waste minimisation by subsidising compost bins, promoting reusable nappies, stopping junk mail and reducing the use of plastic bags.

The officer advised that changes in waste management were required to meet the LPSA targets. Two additional staff had been recruited to promote the scheme and to educate the public. He explained that a joint strategy with WLWA and the use of new technologies were needed to deal with the increasing waste.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the location of the landfill sites the Waste Management Policy Officer replied that sites in Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire were currently used.

In response to a question by a Member regarding the fact that households could hold an unlimited number of bins the officer replied that the Council's current policy was to allow residents to have as many bins as they needed. He continued explaining that the Council, as part of the review, should consider whether this was still appropriate given the recycling targets. He referred to the position in Barnet where the Council had declared the use of their kerbside box (for recycling) to be compulsory. However, he advised that at present, the Local Authority had a statutory duty to remove all waste, provided it was presented in the required manner, although other local authorities had enforced restrictions on the volume of waste collected from each household.

The Sub-Committee proceeded to consider the recommendations from officers set out in the report of the Director of Organisational Performance regarding the in-depth review of Waste Management which the Sub-Committee would undertake.

**RESOLVED:** That (1) the proposed scope and methodology for the review outlined in the officer report be adopted with the addition of a visit to a landfill site and Member Outreach to start in August instead of September;

(2) the review on Waste Management be prioritised in the Sub-Committee's Work Programme and that the existing review of Waste Management be subsumed into the review;

(3) all Sub-Committee Members be included in the review group and Councillor Blann be the Lead Member of the review;

(4) a member of Harrow Agenda 21 be co-opted as a member of the review group;

(5) the review of the Green Belt Management Policy be deferred until the Waste Management review has been completed;

(6) an officer presentation on the Green Belt Management Policy be made to the September meeting; and

(7) the presentation and the report of the Director of Organisational Performance be noted.

102. **Housing Best Value Review - Progress Report on Action Plan:**

The Sub-Committee received the joint report of the ALMO Project Director and the Director of Professional Services, Urban Living which outlined the areas in the 'Your Home Your Needs Best Value Review' which the Sub-Committee had chosen to monitor.

Officers reported that progress had been made in most areas of Housing but that a lack of resources had held back improvement in some areas and this was indicated in Appendix 2. It was explained that Housing was to report back to the Audit Commission in June on the progress in implementing their recommendations. It was advised that one of the Audit Commission's recommendations had been that the Cabinet, the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum and the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Sub-Committee were kept informed of the progress.

The Chair commented on the 'Strategy and Enabling Performance Improvement Plan', circulated to Members in Appendix 2.

In response to the Chair's comment on a slippage in achieving a Fit for Purpose Housing Strategy, officers stated that work was in hand to achieve this, in consultation with the Government Office for London.

The Chair noted that, in relation to the Private Sector Housing, a bid for additional staff to improve services to "*enable proactive enforcement in the sector and register of non compliant landlords*", had not been granted by Council. The Sub-Committee endorsed the bid and agreed with officers that the bid should be resubmitted in 2005/06. The Chair stressed that Harrow had no families living in bed and breakfast accommodation and thanked the staff for their hard work in achieving this.

In response to a query regarding the compensation scheme from a back benching Councillor attending the meeting, an officer stated that currently complaints were considered on a case by case basis but that Housing was looking to develop a formal corporate procedure on complaints.

**RESOLVED:** That the joint report of the ALMO Project Director and the Director of Professional Services, Urban Living, be noted.

103. **Planning and Development Improvement Plan 2004/05-2006/07:**

The Sub-Committee received the report of the Chief Planning Officer which outlined the 'Planning and Development Improvement Plan' developed to meet the national targets to improve performance and services.

The Chief Planning Officer explained that previous reports of the Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) had expressed concerns regarding the Planning department's capacity to handle planning applications within set deadlines. The officer explained that the decrease in performance had been due to planning applications increasing significantly since 1994/95 without a corresponding increase in staff. He continued explaining that this process had since been turned around but that the Government's assessment of performance was based on results dating from 2000/01, hence the rather negative reports from ODPM. The officer advised that the department had recently received ODPM's latest draft report which was more encouraging, although issues such as performance on minor applications, improved IT system and levels of delegation of applications were still outstanding.

**RESOLVED:** That the report of the Chief Planning Officer be noted.

104. **Extension and Termination of the Meeting:**

In accordance with the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 6.7 it was

**RESOLVED:** (1) At 10.00 pm to continue until 10.10 pm and

(2) at 10.10 pm to continue until 10.15 pm.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.33 pm, closed at 10.12 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR ALAN BLANN  
Chair