

**STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY
SUB-COMMITTEE****14 OCTOBER 2004**

Chair: * Councillor Thammaiah

Councillors: * Gate * Omar
* Kara (2) * Osborn (1)
* Lavingia (1) * Seymour* Denotes Member present
(1) and (2) Denote category of Reserve Member**PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL****PART II - MINUTES**117. **Attendance by Reserve Members:****RESOLVED:** To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:-

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor Janet Cowan Councillor Dharmarajah Councillor Vina Mithani	Councillor Kara Councillor Lavingia Councillor Osborn

118. **Declarations of Interest:****RESOLVED:** To note that the following interest was declared:

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
13 - Safer Harrow Crime and Drugs Audit to Strategy Consultation Progress and Audit Findings	Councillor Gate	Declared a non-prejudicial interest arising from the fact that his partner was a health professional.

119. **Arrangement of Agenda:****RESOLVED:** That (1) all items be considered with the press and public present; and
(2) item 11 on the Main Agenda be considered after item 13.120. **Minutes:****RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2004, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.121. **Public Questions:****RESOLVED:** To note that no public questions were put at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 8.122. **Petitions:****RESOLVED:** To note that no petitions were received at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 9.123. **Deputations:****RESOLVED:** To note that no deputations were received at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 10.124. **References from Council and Other Committees:****RESOLVED:** To note that no references from Council and/or other committees were received at this meeting.

125. **Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2003/2004:**
The Sub-Committee was invited to approve a draft report of the Chair on the work undertaken by the Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee over the past year, for inclusion in the 2003/2004 Scrutiny Annual Report.
- An officer advised Members that the Annual Report would be received by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 October 2004 and would subsequently be put to Council for consideration on 21 October 2004. The Chair invited the Sub-Committee to comment upon the report and to add any relevant items to the work programme for 2004/2005.
- In the discussion that followed, a Member commented that he had received complaints from residents within his constituency regarding issues of infrastructure, such as the poor state of some of the roads. He considered that there was a need for the Sub-Committee to discuss how these issues impacted upon people's lives and affected the cohesion of the community. In response, the Officer suggested that as these issues were cross-cutting, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could give consideration to which Scrutiny committee would be best suited to deliberate issues of this nature or whether a review group could be set up which drew its membership from the relevant committees.
- In relation to the section of the report detailing future areas of work, a Member requested that the Crime and Disorder Strategy for 2003/2004 be included, which item was already part of the Sub-Committee's work programme for 2005.
- The Chair undertook to report the above issues to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled to take place on 19 October 2004.
- RESOLVED:** That the Sub-Committee approve the draft Chair's report on the Sub-Committee's work over the past year for inclusion in the 2003/2004 Scrutiny Annual Report, subject to the above.
126. **Establishing Local Priorities for Community Strategy 2005:**
A report of the Executive Director (Organisational Development) was presented to the Sub-Committee which detailed the work undertaken by the Harrow Strategic Partnership (HSP) Board and Executive in order to identify local priorities for partnership action.
- An officer informed the Sub-Committee that in order to develop a comprehensive action plan for 2005, 12 priorities for action had been identified, examples of which included 'Anti-Social Behaviour', 'Fear of Crime' and 'Public Transport'. It was advised that a number of proposed actions to address these priorities might be problematic due to a lack of financial resources, although the Sub-Committee was informed that mapping had taken place in order to identify areas where partners could work together in order to produce long term savings.
- In response to a comment made by a Member regarding the value of a cohesive service, the officer replied that it was important to address all problems as part of one comprehensive strategy. For example, in relation to levels of crime this was directly affected by issues such as a lack of employment opportunities and poor housing conditions. It was questioned whether any local research had previously been conducted concerning poverty/older people. In response it was stated that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had produced statistics in this area and, in comparison with the rest of the country, Harrow had fared relatively well, although the income deprivation experienced by some older people was a concern.
- In conclusion, a Member commented that the Council should not become complacent with regard to poverty, to which the Chair added that rather than drawing a comparison with other London Boroughs the focus should be on addressing the problems within Harrow itself.
- RESOLVED:** To (1) note the work being done to develop the priority areas for action for the Harrow Strategic Partnership (HSP); and
- (2) note that action will be required from Council Directorates to deliver HSP priorities.
127. **Strategic Review of Grants to Voluntary Organisations:**
The Sub-Committee received a report of the Director of Financial and Business Strategy which detailed the proposed changes for 2005 with regard to financial support

for the voluntary sector.

An Officer informed Members that the comments made by the Sub-Committee in relation to the Strategic Review of Grants had been submitted to the meeting of the Grants Advisory Panel on 27 July 2004 for consideration.

Members were informed that the revised strategy for 2005 identified the need to improve partnership working, transparency and clarity concerning funding decisions and the capacity and accountability of voluntary organisations within Harrow.

In the discussion that followed, Members sought clarification on a number of issues. With regard to a query concerning the number of voluntary organisations funded through the Council, the Officer stated that this number was difficult to estimate as a cohesive, transparent strategy had not yet come into force, but approximately 90 groups were funded through the Grants Panel and an additional 400 were funded through the remainder of the Council. In response to queries surrounding the implications of the new strategy for funding, the Sub-Committee was informed that the revised strategy would more than likely result in a greater financial budget and a marked increase in long term savings. For example, the allocation of a grant rather than community space would allow voluntary organisations to decide for themselves upon the least expensive location for their group.

RESOLVED: To note the proposed strategy for future support to the voluntary sector.

128. **Safer Harrow Crime and Drugs Audit to Strategy Consultation Progress and Audit Findings:**

A report of the Interim Head of the Crime Reduction Unit/DAT was presented to the Sub-Committee which detailed the findings of the 'Safer Harrow Crime and Drugs Audit' and the progress made in relation to devising a strategy arising from these.

The Sub-Committee was informed that the Crime and Disorder Act had stipulated that an audit of local crime and drug problems must be undertaken once every 3 years. Information from this audit had been circulated to the residents of Harrow in order to build a strategy that could be implemented in Spring 2005. It was advised that the response rate to the questionnaire had been high and at present the analysis of the information generated from this was taking place.

In relation to the consultation process and audit findings, Members were advised that the fear of crime was increasing amongst Harrow residents, despite the fact that the statistics demonstrated Harrow was the second safest London Borough in which to live. This low crime rate was partly attributed to the work undertaken by the Harrow Partnership.

One of the main priorities of the strategy would be to increase the quality of life for Harrow residents by reducing levels of anti-social behaviour, such as noise pollution and the amount of litter on the streets.

With regard to crime it was advised that a number of successes had been achieved. For example, there had been a marked increase in the reporting of domestic violence, and incidents of street crime had decreased since 2002. However, the number of young people who became victims of crime was a concern, as was the increasing number of motor vehicle offences and incidents of violence against the person (VAP).

In the discussion that followed Members sought clarification on a number of issues. In response to a query regarding the recording of drug related offences, the officer advised that methods of recording varied according to each individual Borough and how issues surrounding drugs were prioritised. For example, in Harrow the number of those receiving treatment had increased significantly due to the fact that treatment had become more widely available. The officer advised Members that information setting out the number of people entering treatment programmes across all London Boroughs was available for comparison and could be issued to the Sub-Committee for information. A Member questioned the officer as to whether detailed statistics were available highlighting incidents of crime from street to street. The officer responded by explaining that crime was mapped geographically within London and studied at a localised level.

Arising from the above discussions, a Member requested that these detailed statistics be provided as a regular item on the agenda of the Sub-Committee along with a report detailing how crime is monitored. In addition, once the Crime and Drug Strategy had

been put together it was requested that it be reported back to the Sub-Committee for consideration.

RESOLVED: That (1) the information be noted; and

(2) the requests outlined above be given consideration.

129. **Post Office Closure Programme:**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Director of Organisational Performance which detailed Harrow Council's response to Post Office Ltd in relation to its proposed Post Office closure programme.

A Member questioned the reasons why Post Office Ltd was recommended to reconsider its decision to close some Post Offices, whilst for others it was strongly recommended to reconsider. In response, the officer stated that the wording had been based on the situation at each branch; for example, planning permission had been submitted for a large development close to the Honeypot Lane Branch, which, it was thought was likely to increase custom and hence the viability of this particular Post Office. There was hope that some branches could be saved as Postwatch had recommended that the review mechanism be used for two of the Post Offices. However, it was advised that there was still the need to be realistic about the situation.

In relation to a query regarding the legal opinion included with the response, the Sub-Committee was informed that this was included on the basis that, should the Council have concerns about the consultation process by Post Office Ltd, this could be followed up at a later stage.

In conclusion, a Member stated that this was an issue that united all 3 parties and highlighted the importance of maintaining the pressure on Post Office Ltd in order to achieve results.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.32 pm, closed at 8.55 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR KEEKIRA THAMMAIAH
Chair