

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE**30 NOVEMBER 2004**

Chair: * Councillor Blann

Councillors:	* Arnold	* Seymour
	* Knowles	* Thammaiah (4)
	* Miles	* Anne Whitehead

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

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**119. **Appointment of Chair:**

RESOLVED: To note the appointment, at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 November 2004, of Councillor Blann as Chair of the Sub-Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2004/2005.

120. **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 Lavingia	Councillor Thammaiah

121. **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.

122. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

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

123. **Appointment of Vice Chair:**

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Arnold as Vice-Chair of the Sub-Committee for the remainder of 2004/2005 Municipal Year.

124. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2004, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

125. **Public Questions:**

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

126. **Petitions:**

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

127. **Deputations:**

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

128. **Reference from the meeting of Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum held on 13 October 2004: Matters Raised by Cottesmore Tenants' and Residents' Association:**

The Sub-Committee received a reference from the meeting of the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum held on 13 October 2004, which asked the Sub-Committee to consider tree management on Council estates, particularly trees placed under Tree Preservation Orders.

The Sub-Committee discussed the reference and noted that tree management was a problematic issue on several estates. It was suggested that the five-year plan, which had been put in place to deal with the trees on the Cottesmore Estate, could be made shorter to speed up the process.

However, it was recognised that the Sub-Committee lacked sufficient information on the relevant policies and on the reasons for issuing Tree Preservation Orders to reach a conclusion, and that an officer report on the issue was required.

RESOLVED: That (1) a report be made to the Sub-Committee regarding the management of trees under Tree Preservation Orders in the Borough, and on Cottesmore Estate in particular;

(2) the Tenants' and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum be informed of the action taken by the Sub-Committee; and

(3) the reference be noted.

129. **Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO):**

The Planning, Development and Housing Portfolio Holder and the Executive Director, Urban Living, had been invited to the meeting to explain and answer questions on the recent Cabinet decision not to proceed with an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO). The Chair welcomed them both to the meeting.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development and Housing explained that the Council's decision to launch the ALMO had been taken about 18 months ago as the most appropriate way to achieve the Decent Home Standard by 2010. At the time, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) had offered three options: an ALMO, stock transfer to Registered Social Landlords and Housing Revenue Account PFI.

However, the decision to launch the ALMO had been revisited recently, as another option had been made available to the Council. The Government had introduced the prudential borrowing regime on 1 April 2004, which allowed the Council to fund the necessary capital investment through its own sources.

The Executive Director, Urban Living advised that the prudential borrowing scheme was more cost effective when taking into account the cost of establishing and running the ALMO, even though the latter was a subsidised borrowing scheme. Furthermore, a financial modelling of the Housing Revenue Account, which showed projected surpluses over a 30-year period, had demonstrated that the prudential borrowing regime would also be a cheaper solution in the long term.

It was advised that the prudential borrowing scheme was launched in April this year but that the guidelines had not been available until July, hence the late decision. The ODPM had recognised that the prudential borrowing scheme was the best option for Harrow.

A Member of the Sub-Committee commented that if the Council had made an increased bid to launch the ALMO, this option would have become cheaper than the prudential borrowing scheme. In response, the Executive Director, Urban Living replied that all the relevant financial information had been put to the External Auditors, who were satisfied with the Council's transactions.

A Member expressed concern regarding the short timescale for carrying out an Option Appraisal to demonstrate that the Decent Homes Standard would be met in the most cost effective way. The Director of Strategy, Urban Living stated, however, that a strategy was being prepared and that the Council would receive regular feedback from the ODPM on the progress of this strategy.

In response to a Member's query regarding a future ALMO re-bid, it was confirmed that this would still be possible at a later stage. In response to a further query regarding the future of the ALMO Shadow Board, it was confirmed that the Board had ceased its activities.

It was noted that the Sub-Committee would receive regular updates on the prudential borrowing regime.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report of the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development and Housing and the Executive Director, Urban Living, be noted.

130. **Flooding - Consultation on Maps of Risk Areas:**

At the last meeting of the Sub-Committee, held on 27 September 2004, Members had asked that maps of flood risk areas be circulated. Officers had advised, however, that at present no such maps were produced, and it had therefore been agreed that the issue be discussed further at this meeting of the Sub-Committee.

Officers explained that there were several risks involved in the production of flooding risk maps, as the information could devalue properties and the Council could subsequently be challenged for producing such material. The Council did not have the resources nor the information to produce accurate maps on flooding risk areas. It was explained that the flooding risk maps which were available through the Environment Agency only referred to flooding from rivers. These maps, which could be found at www.environment-agency.gov.uk, had been produced with resources not available to the Council and were still being challenged.

The Council could produce information on historical facts, as all reports of flooding had been stored and could be produced, but this would not be an accurate account of the risk areas in the Borough. In addition, it was noted that many incidents were never reported.

RESOLVED: That (1) the Environment Agency's maps on flooding risk areas in Harrow be circulated to Members;

(2) Members who wish to receive maps on known flooding risks in certain areas contact the relevant officers to obtain such information; and

(3) the above be noted.

131. **Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill and Preparation of the Local Development Framework:**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Director of Strategy, Urban Living, which outlined the key elements of the Local Development Framework (LDF) and a synopsis of the objectives of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

The Director of Strategy, Urban Living, explained that the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act had a number of objectives: to shorten the time taken by the Development Control Committee to examine development proposals; to simplify the planning system by reducing the amount of national planning guidance; to replace the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) with the LDF; to focus on regional specific strategies; and to stress sustainable development.

It was advised that considerable pressure would be put on the Council to implement the LDF as the Government required it to be in place by March 2007. There were several steps to complete, and extensive research and community involvement would be required prior to the introduction of the LDF.

The report of the Director of Strategy stressed the importance of recruiting competent staff for four new posts to deal with community liaison, consultation and project management as there was an inherent tension in balancing the wishes of local communities against the demands of the Mayor of London's Spatial Strategy. It was noted that the Council would be assessed on its capacity to carry out the Project Plan and the Community Involvement Strategy.

It was explained that the LDF was intended to provide a more flexible framework for planning. Like the UDP, the LDF would consist of several documents, but it would not have to be approved and revised as a whole document. The LDF would be more loosely bound together and parts could be added without a full review of the LDF.

In response to a Member's question regarding whether the implementation of the LDF would slow down the planning application process, the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development and Housing replied that there should be no implications for the application process. However, he stated that if Members were to use Development Control Committee meetings to show their discontent with the LDF, this would hold up the application process.

It was agreed that the Director of Strategy would circulate a relevant extract from a Planning magazine on the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to Members of the Sub-Committee.

Members also noted the shortage of staff and the subsequent constraints on the department's capacity for producing reports.

RESOLVED: That (1) an update on the Planning and Compulsory Act be provided to a future meeting of the Sub-Committee, when the relevant information was available; and

(2) the report be noted.

132. **Transport Local Implementation Plan - Scoping:**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Interim Head of Environment and Transport regarding the preparation of the Transport Local Implementation Plan (LIP). The Plan was a statutory requirement and set out transport plans for the next five years. The timescale for the preparation of the TLIP was set by the Mayor of London. The Plan was due to be finalised in March 2005 and would be consulted upon with stakeholders. There would be provision for adjustments in the process as this was a long-term plan. The Council was currently looking at how best to condense the report to present it to the stakeholders who would take part in the consultation.

The Chair expressed concern over the lack of public involvement in the LIP, as the consultation would only target stakeholders, and suggested that the Sub-Committee organise public meetings in different areas in Harrow.

A Member felt that it would be easier to get the views of hard-to-reach groups by attending meetings of community groups and local associations rather than by organising public meetings. It was also suggested that any meeting or consultation should stress that the consultation was focused on the overall strategies in transport and not on particular issues.

The Interim Head of Environment and Transport reminded the meeting of the resource implications in organising public meetings and of the short timescales for the consultation.

RESOLVED: That (1) the Chair liaise with the Scrutiny Unit on facilitating public involvement in the LIP; and

(2) the report be noted.

133. **Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy:**

The report of the Executive Director, Urban Living, informed the Sub-Committee of the recently adopted Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy which allowed the Council to provide financial assistance, as appropriate, for people in private homes.

The new policy set out how the Council would provide access to grants, and replaced the Housing Grants Policy. Although the new policy had been implemented, there would be a transition period as grants applications, which were received prior to 16 July 2003, would be considered under previous grant policies. Grant enquiries were dealt with in order of date; as a result, a low number of grants had been approved to date under the Private Sector Housing Renewal Grants Policy 2003.

It was noted that Home Safety Grants, which were available to vulnerable groups in collaboration with the police, had been a great success. 127 grants had been awarded at a cost of £61,662. The police had reported a 40% reduction in distraction burglaries and a 30% reduction in burglary against older people.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the size of the grants under the new scheme, officers replied that there was a cap limit of £25,000 in the new grants policy.

RESOLVED: That a report be made on the progress of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy to the Sub-Committee's meeting in September 2005.

134. **Licensing Act 2003, Licensing Policy and Consultation, Update on the Licensing Position:**

The Sub-Committee received an update report on the Licensing Act 2003 from the Chief Environmental Health Officer. The Act had created a new statutory duty for Local Authorities to license premises and persons for the sale of alcohol, and required the

Council to produce its own Licensing Policy. It was advised that Harrow's policy had gone out for consultation and that the final document had been recommended to the Council for approval by the Licensing and General Purposes Committee.

It was reported that there was enormous potential pressure on the Licensing Panel, as all current permits would have to be reconsidered during 2005 and applications with objectors would also have to be considered by the Panel.

The Sub-Committee voiced concern regarding the potential pressure on the Members of the Licensing Panel and asked that the membership of the Panel be established as soon as possible. It was suggested that an increase in allowances for Members of the Licensing Panel be considered, as the workload might increase considerably.

RESOLVED: That (1) the Licensing and General Purposes Committee be requested to consider establishing the membership of the Licensing Panel as soon as possible;

(2) Council be requested to consider a special responsibility allowance for Members who serve on the Licensing Panel and;

(3) the report be noted.

135. **Progress Reports on Reviews - Members' Verbal Updates:**

The Chair reported that the Sub-Committee had planned several visits as part of the in-depth review of Waste Management. The Sub-Committee had already made visits to Bexley and Daventry to gain an understanding of their practices. Visits to the composting site at Harefield, to Barnet to see the results of the Authority's decision to fine any resident who did not participate in the recycling scheme, and to the Harrow collection round, would take place in December 2004.

There would be additional meetings with the Waste Management Manager and the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport.

The Sub-Committee's final report on Waste Management was expected to be produced in January.

RESOLVED: That the verbal update be noted.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.32 pm, closed at 9.50 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR COUNCILLOR ALAN BLANN
Chair