

**STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY  
SUB-COMMITTEE****25 JANUARY 2005**

Chair: \* Councillor Thammaiah

Councillors:	Janet Cowan	Vina Mithani
	* Ann Groves (3)	* Omar
	* Lavingia (1)	* Osborn (1)

\* Denotes Member present  
(1) and (3) Denote category of Reserve Member

[Note: Councillor Marie-Louise Nolan also attended this meeting in a participatory role].

**PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL****PART II - MINUTES**130. **Appointment of Chair:**

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

131. **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 Dharmarajah	Councillor Ann Groves
Councillor Gate	Councillor Lavingia
Councillor Seymour	Councillor Osborn

132. **Declarations of Interest:**

**RESOLVED:** To note that the following interest was declared:

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
11. Crime and Drugs Strategy (2005-2008)	Councillor Ann Groves	Declared a personal interest arising from the fact that she is a magistrate.

133. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

**RESOLVED:** That (1) item 13 on the Main Agenda be considered before item 12; and  
(2) all items be considered with the press and public present;

134. **Appointment of Vice-Chair:**

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Seymour be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Sub-Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2004/2005.

135. **Minutes:**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2004, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

136. **Public Questions:**

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

137. **Petitions:**

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

138. **Deputations:**

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

139. **References from Council and Other Committees:**

**RESOLVED:** To note that no references were received from Council and/or other Committees at the meeting.

140. **Question and Answer Session with the Portfolio Holder for Communications, Partnership and Human Resources:**

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Holder to the meeting and began the question and answer session by addressing the Post Office closure programme. The Portfolio Holder was asked whether the Council would have a further role in ensuring that the remaining Post Office branches were adequate and improved as far as possible.

In response, the Portfolio Holder stated that the closure programme would need to be monitored, and that this could be an area for the Sub-Committee to return to in six months' to a year's time. She noted that despite the closure of many Post Offices, remaining branches had not experienced an increase in usage. She suggested that this might be the result of new electronic services such as the payment of pensions directly into bank accounts.

A Member commented that it might be possible for London Boroughs to pursue legal action against Post Office Ltd. In response, the Portfolio Holder suggested that consultation with neighbouring boroughs should occur before any action was taken, but agreed to consult with her fellow Portfolio Holders on this issue.

A Member having asked a question relating to the area of youth diversionary activities and, in particular, how partnerships would play a role in the provision of facilities, the Portfolio Holder informed the Sub-Committee that a report in this area was currently being drafted and was to be submitted to the meeting of the Cabinet in March. She highlighted the importance of both the work undertaken by the Youth Offending Team, and the provision of after-school activities. With regard to community groups, she emphasised that communication was essential in order to analyse the provision of youth services in the borough and to investigate what activities young people would prefer to do in their spare time.

The remainder of Members' questions to the Portfolio Holder focused on the Harrow Strategic Partnership (HSP). Members expressed concern as to how the Council would ensure that the HSP was held accountable for its decision-making and use of resources. The Portfolio Holder responded by stating that there were four Elected Members on the HSP Board who represented the main political parties. Concerning her own role, the Portfolio Holder stated that she served on both the Executive and the Board which enabled the reporting of work to stakeholders and to the Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

In response to a further question from a Member, the Portfolio Holder provided information with regard to the engagement of local community and voluntary groups in the Partnership. In particular, she highlighted that four representatives from the voluntary sector would serve on the HSP board until May 2006. A Member commented that, as Chair of two Reference Groups, she had received little feedback from the Partnership. The Portfolio Holder agreed to investigate the matter and provide an update report at the next meeting of the Sub-Committee scheduled to take place on 13 April 2005.

The role of scrutiny in monitoring the HSP's effectiveness was queried. The Portfolio Holder informed Members that the HSP should be appropriately inclusive and adept at identifying local needs and that, consequently, scrutiny had a role to play in ensuring that this occurred. In addition, the Portfolio Holder stated that the monitoring of the Community Engagement Strategy and the assessment of its effectiveness were also functions that scrutiny could perform. In response to a query regarding the extent of the influence that scrutiny could exert over the policy making process, the Portfolio Holder highlighted the value of scrutiny being involved at an early stage in the process.

To conclude the question and answer session, the Portfolio Holder's views were sought on the future development of the HSP. She stated that it was important to measure the impact of the Partnership; the Government was now assessing how authorities pursued their priorities and the successes that were achieved. In addition, she emphasised the importance of pooling resources and expertise, and the need to involve local businesses. An officer advised of an improvement plan being used by all London boroughs, and undertook to forward this to the Lead Officer for the Sub-Committee.

**RESOLVED:** That (1) the above be noted; and

(2) an update report on feedback from the Harrow Strategic Partnership to Reference Groups be provided at the next meeting of the Sub-Committee scheduled to take place on 13 April 2005.

(Note: Following due consideration, this item was taken at the beginning of the meeting before all other items on the agenda).

141. **Harrow Community Transport - The Future:**

The Sub-Committee received a presentation from two representatives of Harrow Community Transport Network. Members were informed that the organisation had been established 25 years ago, as a result of a study conducted by the Harrow Association of Disabled People. It was advised that the organisation was run by volunteers and provided safe, accessible transport for individuals and other organisations within the borough.

The Sub-Committee was informed that Harrow Community Transport Network was currently undergoing a re-structuring programme which included the appointment of new trustees, a full-time manager and a part-time administrative assistant. This required substantial funds which it was hoped could be gained through the Bridge House Trust and, potentially, Harrow Council, Harrow Primary Care Trust and Transport for London.

In the discussion that followed, Members sought clarification on a number of issues. In response to a query regarding the support that the Authority could offer the organisation, it was noted that the Grants Advisory Panel had recommended that a sum of £5,000 be donated to the organisation. Additionally, a Member suggested that the Executive be requested to fully support the work of Harrow Community Transport Network and to administer financial aid as and when it was required, to which it was agreed.

The Sub-Committee requested that it be kept informed of any developments regarding the organisation's bids for funds, to enable Members to lend additional support at a later stage.

**RESOLVED:** That (1) the above information be noted;

(2) the Executive be requested to fully support the work of Harrow Community Transport Network and to administer financial aid as and when it is required; and

(3) the Sub-Committee be kept informed of any developments regarding the organisation's re-structuring programme and bids for funds.

142. **Crime and Drugs Strategy (2005 - 2008):**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Interim Head of the Crime Reduction Unit and the Drug Action Team (DAT), which detailed the Council's draft Crime and Drugs Strategy and priorities for 2005-2008. The Sub-Committee additionally received an update report on crime statistics within the borough from a representative of the Metropolitan Police.

Members were informed that the fear of crime was high amongst Harrow residents despite the fact that there had been a marked decrease in the number of certain crimes. For example, there had been a month on month decrease in the incidence of residential burglary throughout the year. However, concern was expressed at the levels of racial and homophobic related crimes in the borough.

With regard to the Crime and Drugs Strategy, it was advised that after national and local priorities had been considered and the results of widespread consultation with the public analysed, four main priority areas had been identified for inclusion in the strategy. These consisted of tackling and preventing youth crime, property crime, a reduction in the impact of anti-social behaviour and Violence Against the Person (VAP). In addition, Members were informed that three cross-cutting themes were to underpin each of these priority areas - Community Involvement and Diversity, Prolific and Priority

Offenders Scheme, and Drugs and Alcohol. The officer noted that fear of crime was a particular issue in Harrow, in comparison with the actual level of crime that took place.

In the discussion that followed, Members sought clarification on a number of issues. In response to a query regarding the after-care available for drug users, it was advised that the government targets on Drug Treatment and Testing Orders had been met in Harrow, although work would be undertaken with the police in cases where these orders were not being complied with.

**RESOLVED:** That the above be noted.

(See also Minute 132).

143. **Towards a Corporate Community Engagement Strategy:**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Director of Organisational Performance which detailed the first stage in the production of the Council's Community Engagement Strategy.

Members were informed that the report was a discussion paper. They were invited to endorse the principles contained within Harrow Council's Code of Engagement, and to comment upon the list of organisations that would be consulted on the Community Engagement Strategy.

It was advised that once the consultation groups had had an opportunity to express their views, the approval of Members would be sought, followed by public consultation. The Sub-Committee agreed that the Partnership for Older People should be included in the list of consultees.

In the discussion that followed, Members sought clarification on a number of issues. In response to a query regarding the extent of the impact that consultees could have on the policy making process, an officer advised that there was a need for effective communication with the general public, which included a degree of honesty. In relation to mass consultation, a Member commented that this often became the property of a few and enquired as to whether area forums still existed; an officer undertook to provide clarification on this issue.

In conclusion, it was advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be considering the Community Engagement Strategy as part of its 2005/2006 Work Programme and that the input of this Sub-Committee would be sought. Members were informed that a review group was to be established and nominations were invited, in order to provide a facilitative role between the Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillors Ann Groves and Osborn both expressed an interest in serving on this review group.

**RESOLVED:** That (1) the principles contained within the discussion paper be endorsed; and

(2) the Partnership for Older People be added to the list of consultees.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.31 pm, closed at 10.09 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR KEEKIRA THAMMAIAH  
Chair