

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIVE FORUM

26 JANUARY 2005

Chair: * Councillor Nana Asante

Councillors: * Arnold * Harriss (1)
* Janet Cowan * Lavingia
* Currie * Omar

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

[NB Attendance at this meeting by representatives of community organisations and representatives of the Local Authority is recorded at Appendix 1].

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**118. **Appointment of Chair:**

RESOLVED: To note the appointment of Councillor Nana Asante as the Chair of the Community Consultative Forum for the remainder of the 2004/2005 Municipal Year, as agreed at the Cabinet Meeting of 11 November 2004.

119. **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 Anjana Patel	Councillor Harriss

120. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
Councillor Arnold	Declared an interest arising from the fact that he is a Member of the Grants Advisory Panel.
Councillor Nana Asante	Declared an interest arising from the fact that she is a Member of the Grants Advisory Panel and a Member of the Black History Steering Group

121. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

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

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

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Janet Cowan as Vice-Chair of the Community Consultative Forum for the remainder of the 2004/2005 Municipal Year.

123. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2004, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- (i) Presentation by a Community Group (Minute 105)
To amend the final paragraph to read:

“The representative closed the presentation by informing the Forum that there would be an opportunity to make a donation to the Darfur in Sudan and the Mayor’s Charity.”

- (ii) Any Other Urgent Business (Minute 117)
To amend the minute to reflect the nature and location of the following community event:

Community event held by the Gujurati Association of the UK at the Kadiwar Patwa Centre in Kenmore Avenue.

- (iii) Representatives of Community Organisations who Attended (Appendix 1)
To correct the spelling of the names of the community representatives, as follows:

M Bamtefa	African SANG / IJAPA
H Ibrahim	Somali Family Support Group

124. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 15 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

125. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at this meeting under the provisions of the Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 13 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

126. **Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

127. **Tsunami Disaster:**

The Forum stood and observed a two-minute silence in remembrance of the victims of the Tsunami disaster.

128. **Presentations by Community Groups:**

The Forum received presentations from representatives of three voluntary organisations within the borough: Sewa International, Compassion in Action, and Diva Asian Women's Network (DAWN). The first two organisations had been working independently to provide relief in areas affected by the recent Tsunami disaster. Both provided the Forum with details of their immediate relief work, as well as an outline of proposed long-term projects, and expressed their sadness at the devastation and destruction caused by the disaster.

The Forum then heard from counsellors working at DAWN, a support network provided for Asian women that aimed to empower those who felt alienated by cultural, social and personal issues. The Forum was informed that the counsellors were able to give sympathetic advice and guidance in a safe and flexible environment, and understood the particular difficulties faced by Asian women living in the UK.

RESOLVED: That the information be noted.

129. **Improving Welfare Benefit Take-Up:**

The Forum received a presentation on this matter from the Income and Payments Manager and the Group Manager, Assessment. The presentation outlined the Council's plans to develop a Welfare Benefit Strategy that would ensure that those who were eligible could receive the financial assistance and services to which they were entitled, by removing the barriers that might have prevented them from doing so. The Forum was advised that the Strategy aimed to promote benefit take-up, particularly amongst the hard-to-reach groups of Harrow and those who might be particularly disadvantaged because of personal circumstances.

The Forum was informed that a joint team of trained visiting officers had been set up, able to collect information from within the client's home and share this with the relevant agencies. The use of technology in data collection was also being explored, to ensure that a client's key data was only collected once and therefore preventing duplication of efforts. The officers stated that the Council was keen to expand the operation of the

joint team to engage with as many groups within Harrow as possible, and welcomed the comments of the voluntary and community groups present.

In response to a query regarding how user-friendly the service was, it was advised that visiting officers could communicate in all the main community languages, and that a translator could be provided if necessary. Explanatory leaflets were also being produced that covered all the main community languages. The officers informed the Forum that the joint team simplified the sometimes complicated process of completing forms, and that electronically collecting and sharing data would further simplify the process.

The role of voluntary groups within the scheme was also discussed. The Forum was advised that some clients would prefer to approach voluntary organisations rather than the Council, for example if the client had debts. It was also suggested that the Strategy would benefit from sharing the experience and information held by voluntary and community groups, but concern was expressed over the funding required to enable this. The officers agreed to meet with any interested parties to provide further information, and expressed a wish to hear from community groups of any barriers that may exist to accessing the Benefits, Cashiers and Revenues services for their members such as languages, opening times and physical accessibility. The Forum was advised that the team was keen to engage with groups that had not previously been consulted.

The officers accepted an invitation to return to the Forum to present an update on their work.

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

(2) the officers liaise with the Chair concerning update reports on the progress of the Welfare Benefit Take-Up Strategy.

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

The Forum received a report of the Director of Organisational Performance, which detailed the development of the Council's Community Engagement Strategy. It was hoped that the strategy would improve and standardise the way in which local communities could contribute to the decision-making process. The purpose of the presentation was to involve the community groups present in a discussion on the development of the strategy.

Several areas of the report were highlighted, such as the groups the Council might wish to engage with, a Code of Engagement for both the Council and stakeholders, weaknesses in current engagement activity identified by stakeholders, and Harrow's Code of Practice on Consultation.

In the discussion that followed, the Forum was informed that the Engagement Strategy hoped to ensure effective engagement across all parts of the community, and especially those minority and under-represented groups in the borough that may not have engaged in previous consultations. In response to a comment that the community groups might be saturated by consultation, the officer stated that developing different techniques for consultation with different target groups would hopefully make the process more engaging.

The officer requested that community groups register their comments on the strategy by 11 February 2005.

RESOLVED: That the information be noted.

131. **Harrow Leisure Centre:**

In response to questions raised at previous meetings of the Forum, the Sports Strategy Officer for Harrow Council provided community groups with a verbal update report on the management of Harrow Leisure Centre. The respective responsibilities of the Council and Leisure Connections Plc were outlined, along with a plan of action for key areas of development and a detailed complaints procedure.

In the discussion that followed, it was advised that user forums had been established to allow the public to comment on the level of service provided. A representative of a community group who claimed that his letter of complaint had not been dealt with in the recommended timeframe was assured that the matter would be resolved. In response to a query regarding the discounted facilities available to pensioners, the Forum was

informed that a leisure card was currently available which entitled them to free swimming, and that this would hopefully be extended to other activities. The Forum was assured that the Council protected the pricing on 'core' leisure activities, whilst allowing Leisure Connections to make profits from the 'non-core' activities. Disappointment was expressed that the Council had taken so long to admit to its part in the failings of the leisure centre.

RESOLVED: That the information be noted.

132. **Feedback from the Black History Month Evaluation Meeting:**

In her capacity as a member of the steering group for Black History Month (BHM), the Forum received an oral report from the Chair, which detailed the proceedings at the BHM Evaluation Meeting, held on 19 January 2005. She informed the Forum that a joint report by HACAS and The African SANG was presented to the steering group with a recommendation that an Independent Review of Black History Month 2004 should be held as soon as possible so that the report could inform development of Black History Month 2005.

The aims of the evaluation were to establish the purpose and focus of BHM, and to evaluate how best to engage the community, including schools, colleges, community groups and local businesses in the proceedings. Through the evaluation, it was hoped that recommendations would be made to assist the planning for next year's event, and that the pressures felt this year by a few key organisers would be reduced. Publicity was identified as a key weakness of the project, whilst using a theme was seen to help focus the proceedings. The Forum was encouraged to write to the steering group with their thoughts on BHM, and to advise them on how best to engage the community and to support the call for an independent review.

The Forum was then invited to attend an event organised by Harrow Bengalee Association on Sunday 13 February at Harrow Arts Centre on Uxbridge Road on the Migration theme "How Bengalees Came to Britain", which formed part of the Black History Month programme.

RESOLVED: That the information be noted.

133. **Open Forum:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no suggestions of topics for discussion at future meetings.

134. **Any Other Business:**

The Chair requested volunteers from the Community and Voluntary sectors to form an informal sub-group that would develop a community-led work programme for the forthcoming meetings of the Forum. Nominations were received from:

Varsha Bavishi	Harrow Mencap
Alex da Costa	Harrow Refugee Forum
Kanti Nagda	Sangat Centre
Niru Matin	Harrow Bengalee Association

RESOLVED: That (1) the formation of the informal sub-group be noted; and

(2) the responsible officers liaise with the sub-group to arrange its first meeting.

[Note: Following the meeting, the Chair received an additional nomination from Mohammad Rizvi of the Pakistan Society of Harrow, which she accepted].

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.35 pm, closed at 9.35 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR NANA ASANTE
Chair

APPENDIX 1

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIVE FORUM – 26 JANUARY 2005**(1) Representatives of Community Organisations who Attended**

V Bavishi	Harrow Mencap
M Rizvi	Pakistan Association of Harrow
N Eid	Harrow Kuwati Community Association
A da Costa	Angolan Civic Community Alliance
	Harrow Refugee Forum
G Ali	Pakistan Society of Harrow
K Nagda	Sangat Centre
A Omar	Harrow Islamic Society
V Kapashi	Mahavir Foundation
B Sharma	HARA
P Mewta	Mahavir Foundation
T Chisolm	HACAS
Amrit Shah	DAWN
Bally Basra	
N Matin	Harrow Bengalee Association
A Ali	Harrow Mosque
C Rabbahi	Harrow Mosque
L Gorasia	Hindu Council (Harrow)
	Kutch Madhapar Karyalay (UK)

(2) Officers who Attended

Mark Buckingham	Income and Payments Manager
Michael Carney	Group Manager, Assessment
Patsy Headlam	Policy and Partnership Officer
Clifton Jackson	Sports Strategy Officer