

BEST VALUE ADVISORY PANEL**12 JULY 2005**

Chair: * Councillor Idaikkadar

Councillors: * Bluston * Osborn (1)
* Currie * Pinkus
* Vina Mithani * Ray (4)

* Denotes Member present
(1) and (4) Denote category of Reserve Member

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS**RECOMMENDATION 1 - Best Value Review - Harrow's Economy**

The Panel received a report of the Director of Financial and Business Strategy which set out a scoping document for the Best Value Review on Harrow's Economy.

The Director of Financial and Business Strategy introduced the report and identified the objective of the review which was to bring together the different strands of work being carried out by officers in order to give it a strategic focus. She responded to a number of questions from Members and informed them that:

- small businesses were defined by the number of people employed - less than five staff – and not by the turnover or the definition applied by the Companies House;
- not all businesses were registered for VAT purposes and that many operated from residential properties;
- the mapping exercise would help gather data about the business community of Harrow;
- the business portal was intended to encourage local businesses to register voluntarily which would help improve the Council's knowledge of the businesses in Harrow;
- 'Harrow In Business' was closely involved in the review;
- it was disappointing that, in order to expand, small businesses appeared to move out of Harrow and that the review might reveal why this was happening.

In the discussion that followed, a Member emphasised the need to involve the Chamber of Commerce and the West London Alliance and sought assurances that this would happen. He referred to the proposals for the development of Harrow Town Centre and emphasised the need to try to attract large business as part of the development process. Another Member referred to the large number of commercial properties which were vacant and suggested that businesses could be encouraged to use these premises.

In response, the Director of Financial and Business Strategy reported that:

- the Council was in the process of developing its relationship with various agencies and local businesses as part of this review;
- the portal was a web-site dedicated to businesses in Harrow;
- the first step was to set up a comprehensive data base which would develop as the Business Transformation Partnership (BTP) develops, into a single business account;
- officers from different Directorates were involved in the process in order to ensure a strategic focus.

She agreed that the vacant properties ought to be utilised and that the Council would look to create opportunities for business to move into these premises as part of the review.

Following further discussion, a Member commented that:

- the scoping ought to be thorough;
- the various agencies such as the LDA ought to be fully utilised;
- additional sources of funding ought to be examined;
- a long-term view of Harrow's economy was essential and that Harrow should ensure that it did not miss out on the opportunities available to the London boroughs as part of the staging of the 2012 Olympics and that the proposed regeneration of Harrow Town Centre would also bring to Harrow;
- there was a need for Harrow to have an established policy on the use of the money received as part of the Section 106 Agreements.

The Director of Financial and Business Strategy reported that the Council's desire was to try to provide information, advice and support to local business as part of this review. She added that details of the contracts, which local businesses could bid for, would be provided via the business portal. She explained that the intention was to achieve a balanced economy. She was of the view that the review would help identify reasons why some of the businesses chose to locate/move out of Harrow and also provide opportunities to local businesses to bid for a broad range of Council contracts.

The Director of Financial and Business Strategy stated that:

- it was possible that the Council would re-examine opportunities for Business Improvement Districts which businesses in Harrow Town Centre had previously rejected;
- the West London Alliance would be meeting soon to ensure that the area of West London was not overlooked in the opportunities associated with the 2012 Olympics but that this would be looked at separately and would not be part of the review;
- a separate review of funding opportunities was also underway;
- the purpose of the review of Harrow's Economy was to build a relationship with local businesses first and then widen the review by linking with the LDA and other agencies.

A Member enquired about the techniques that would be used to regenerate parts of the Borough and whether these would be applied equally to both wholesale and retail businesses. She also mentioned the need to look at parking provision. Another Member referred to the apparent lack of reference in the report to fostering links with the ethnic minority business community in the Borough.

In response, the Director of Financial and Business Strategy drew Members' attention to page 8 of the report and referred to the proposed development of the Social Enterprise Strategy and the Incubator Units at Forward Drive. She added that the links with the ethnic minority businesses community and its relationship with the outside world would be addressed. She stated that it was important that the review was forward looking and that it would look at the educational skills required, which business sectors were attracted to Harrow and the reasons behind those that preferred to establish elsewhere. She added that the business portal would be launched soon and that it would be advertised in Harrow People, the Council's own newspaper, which was distributed to all households in the Borough. Additionally, other advertisement campaigns targeting the business community would also be undertaken.

The Director of Organisational Performance added that, in addition to the economic development and regeneration proposals, a strategy on neighbourhood renewal would be submitted to Members.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to the Portfolio Holder)

That the scoping document for the Best Value Review on Harrow's Economy be approved.

PART II - MINUTES157. **Appointment of Chair:**

RESOLVED: To note the appointment of Councillor Idaikkadar as Chair of the Best Value Advisory Panel for the Municipal Year 2005/06, as agreed at the Cabinet meeting held on 19 May 2005.

158. **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 D Ashton Councillor Burchell	Councillor Osborn Councillor Ray

159. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
10. Harrow's Economy	Councillor Bluston	The Member indicated an interest in that he was a Director of Harrow In Business having been appointed by the Council and a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Trade. He remained in the room whilst the matter was considered and voted upon.

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

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Burchell as Vice-Chair of the Best Value Advisory Panel for the Municipal year 2005/06.

161. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

RESOLVED: That (1) the following items be admitted to the agenda for the reasons and special circumstances stated:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Reason</u>
10. Harrow's Economy	This report was not available at the time the main agenda was printed and circulated. Members were asked to consider the report in order to receive their regular update on procurement.
11. Procurement – Update	This report was not available at the time the main agenda was printed and circulated. Members were asked to consider the report to recommend the scoping document for the Best Value Review.

(2) all business be considered with the press and public present with the exception of the following item for the reason set out below:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Reason</u>
11. Procurement – Update	The report contained exempt information under paragraph 8 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) in that contained information relating to any expenditure to be incurred by the authority under any particular contract for the acquisition of property or the supply of goods and services.

162. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That (1) the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2005, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record;

(2) The minutes of the previous meeting be circulated with all future agendas.

163. **Public Questions:**

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

164. **Petitions:**

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

165. **Deputations:**

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

166. **Harrow's Economy:**

See Recommendation 1

167. **Work Programme:**

The Director of Organisational Performance (Organisational Development) reported orally on the work programme of the Panel. He stated that the traditional role of the Best Value Advisory Panel had altered and would continue to do so in light of the changes in the government's agenda. He added that best value had, to some extent, been replaced by the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), the efficiency agenda (Gershon Review), the efficiency strategy and the efficiency targets and how these targets were being achieved. He stated that the Panel's work in these areas could continue but that there would be less emphasis on the traditional service reviews conducted by this Panel.

Members noted that the role of this Panel would continue to alter and commented as follows:

- that the roles of the Best Value Advisory Panel and the Scrutiny bodies ought to be resolved as there were some 'grey' areas which had resulted in some duplication of work;
- that there was a need to review whether there was a meaningful role for the Best Value Advisory Panel;
- that the relationship between the Best Value Advisory Panel and the Scrutiny bodies should be examined, together with the role of the Panel in the Council's decision-making process.

Members referred to the booklet titled 'Best Value Performance Supplement 2005/06' produced by the Council and expressed concern that it had been approved by Cabinet without any reference to the Panel. Members enquired why this had not happened as the Panel's remit was to examine such areas of work.

In response, the Director of Organisational Performance apologised for this oversight. He suggested that it would be appropriate to submit a report to the next meeting of the Panel setting out the relationship between the Panel and the Scrutiny bodies. He explained that the Scrutiny bodies had a greater role to play in relation to the CPA.

A Member stated that it would be useful if the report also focussed on the distinction between the Panel and the Scrutiny bodies. He also commented that the most notable difference between the two was that Members tended to drive and conduct Scrutiny reviews but senior officers managed and conducted Best Value reviews.

Members also referred to the following discussions at previous meetings of the Panel:

- the need to link certain reviews with the Council's Scrutiny bodies.

- the benefits of holding joint meeting(s) of the Panel and the Overview and Scrutiny Members.

RESOLVED: That the Director of Organisational Performance be requested to submit a report to the next meeting of the Panel setting out the relationship between the Panel and the Scrutiny bodies and reviewing the future role of the Panel.

168. **Procurement - Update:**

Members considered a confidential report of the Director of Financial and Business Strategy which set out the savings achieved through the procurement process. The Group Manager for Procurement and Community Links (Business Connections) introduced the report and informed Members that monthly meetings were held with managers to inform them about the levels of savings that would need to be delivered from their individual budgets.

Members welcomed the detailed breakdown on savings provided in the report and requested that the following additional information be provided in future reports submitted to the Panel:

- a further breakdown of the figures which would help identify savings achieved in individual areas;
- further details about individual savings.

A Member highlighted the importance of engaging with the ethnic minority communities of Harrow on the issue of procurement and another Members enquired how procurement would be instigated in relation to the Decent Homes Standards.

In response, the Group Manager for Procurement and Community Links stated that:

- the Business Transformation Partnership (BTP) would play a fundamental role in how services were procured;
- the business portal would help provide the views of local businesses on the tendering of contracts;
- further discussions would take place between officers in relation to the Decent Homes Standards.

He added that discussions with 'Harrow In Business' were already underway in order to address the issue of engaging with local businesses and added that the Council would be looking to forge further links through the West London Alliance.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 8.55 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR THAYA IDAIKKADAR
Chair