

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE**26 SEPTEMBER 2005**

Chair: * Councillor Blann

Councillors: * Arnold * Miles
 * Knowles * Seymour
 * Lavingia * Anne Whitehead

* Denotes Member present

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**172. **Attendance by Reserve Members:****RESOLVED:** To note that no Reserve Members were in attendance at this meeting.173. **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.174. **Arrangement of Agenda:****RESOLVED:** That (1) in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, the following agenda items be admitted late to the agenda by virtue of the special circumstances and grounds for urgency detailed below:-

<u>Agenda item</u>	<u>Special Circumstances/Grounds for Urgency</u>
10. Housing Needs and Supply Annual Statistical Summary	The delay was due to a discrepancy found in the figures that needed to be amended.
15. Local Area Agreements	Policy and Partnership Services was awaiting confirmation from the Government Office for London that the timetable for the next steps in the development of the LAA (section 3.2.3) were appropriate.

(2) agenda items (14) and (15) be considered after item (9) and before item (10);

(3) all items be considered with the press and public present.

175. **Minutes:****RESOLVED:** That, having been circulated, the minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2005, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.176. **Public Questions:****RESOLVED:** To note that no public questions were put at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 8.177. **Petitions:****RESOLVED:** To note that no petitions were received at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 9.178. **Deputations:****RESOLVED:** To note that no deputations were received at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 10.179. **References from Council and Other Committees:****RESOLVED:** To note that there were no references from Council or other committees.

180. **Attendance by the Planning, Development and Housing Portfolio Holder:**

RESOLVED: To note that the Planning, Development and Housing Portfolio Holder had sent his apologies as he was unable to attend the meeting.

181. **Housing Need & Supply Annual Statistical Summary:**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Interim Director of Corporate Property, outlining the statistics relating to housing need and supply during 2004/5. It was noted that table 9.4, indicating Out of Borough Nominations, was a new addition to the Annual Statistical Summary.

In response to a question posed by a Member regarding the statutory housing obligations of the London Borough of Harrow, the officer present stated that the Council had accepted a duty to house 96 of the 1,993 households that had made applications. The officer stated that this figure could be better understood by placing it in the context of the Council's homelessness prevention system, which included the Fresh Start Scheme and the Sanctuary Scheme. Together with a mediation scheme, in which the Council worked with young people to reduce the likelihood of their exclusion from home, Harrow's homelessness prevention system meant that the Council acted before many people were deemed homeless, thus reducing the number of households to which it owed a statutory duty.

In response to a question from a Member regarding Council assistance in evictions from private sector accommodation, the officer stated that Harrow had built up good working relations with private sector landlords, which in some cases had helped to prevent this situation from arising.

In response to questions regarding the data presented in the Housing Need and Supply Annual Statistical Summary, the officer stated that the Information Circular from the 8 June 2005 meeting of the Sub-Committee outlined the number of voids from the previous year, but that at the time of the current meeting, there were no data available to show, throughout the annual period, the duration that properties lay vacant. It was also noted that the figure of 49 transferring council tenants for 2004/5 indicated that although relatively fewer tenants sought to transfer dwellings and incentives were offered for tenants to downsize their dwelling, few of the larger dwellings were being transferred.

Responding to a question put by a Member about LOCATA banding, the officer advised that bands A to C were priority groups and that band D comprised the remainder of Homeseekers. It was noted that of the 4443 households registered at 1 April 2005 just over 51.3% fell into band C, 47.1% into band D, 1.3% into band B, and 0.3% (approximately 25) fell into band A.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

182. **Your Home, Your Needs Best Value Review - Update:**

RESOLVED: To note that (1) it had not been possible for officers to complete the report in time for the meeting;

(2) the report would be considered at a future meeting of the Sub-Committee.

183. **Public Green Spaces Review - Scope:**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Director of People, Policy and Performance outlining the scope of the Public Green Spaces Review.

Officers had identified three themes to be addressed by the Review, namely physical access, community involvement and consideration for biodiversity, and confirmed that the first Review Group meeting would be held on 27 September 2005.

In response to questions from Members, officers advised that all costs for the Review would be met from the existing Scrutiny budget. If approved by Review Groups in January 2006, there would be a period of consultation with Lead Officers from relevant directorates, and that this would lead to consideration of the Review by the Sub-Committee. If approved, the Review would then be recommended to Cabinet before the May 2006 elections.

RESOLVED: That the Scope be agreed.

184. **Scrutiny Review of Tourism - Scope:**
The Sub-Committee received a Scoping Report of the Scrutiny Review of Tourism. Officers stated that one of the primary functions of the Review would be to assess Harrow's Tourism Strategy, which had been approved by Cabinet earlier in 2005. Key themes that the Review would pick up on would include sustainability, infrastructure and community involvement. A member of the Sub Committee welcomed the Review and highlighted the importance of emphasising Harrow's rich heritage.
- RESOLVED:** That the Scope be agreed.
185. **Food Safety Audit - information briefing:**
The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Chief Environmental Health Officer on the Food Safety Audit, which advised the Sub-Committee on the recommendations of the Food Standards Agency following the audit carried out in May 2004.
- Officers stated that the Food Standards Agency would return to Harrow in November 2005 to re-inspect and to check that the Action Plan was being duly completed; he proposed to report back to the Sub-Committee following this re-inspection.
- Responding to questions posed by Members of the Sub-Committee, the officer stated that the information presented in the Audit, together with the recommendations of the Food Standards Agency, was approved on 28 July 2005 by Cabinet in the form of the annual Food Service Plan. The Sub Committee heard that in accordance with the Food Service Plan, documented procedures had been reviewed and amended. The officer stated that the Food Standards Agency had been working on a pilot scheme to publish the results of the Audit on the internet, but that at present, this was not ready to be launched.
- RESOLVED:** To note the report.
186. **Local Area Agreements:**
The Sub-Committee considered a report of the Director of People, Performance and Policy, which outlined the development of Harrow's Local Area Agreement (LAA). Officers advised that Harrow had been awarded the opportunity to negotiate an LAA with Government Office for London, which meant that the Council and its partners would agree targets and priorities for Harrow with central Government. It was explained that the benefits of the LAA would include increased flexibility to find local solutions to local problems, and to prioritise spending to achieve the priorities set by the LAA. These priorities were grouped around four blocks: Children and Young People, Safer and Stronger Communities, Healthier Communities and Older People, and Economic Development and Enterprise.
- The Sub-Committee was briefed on the timetable for the development of the LAA, according to which Harrow had to decide headlines within the four blocks by the end of September 2005. Specific freedoms, flexibilities and funding streams would then be determined in the following months, with Harrow's LAA to be submitted to the Government Office for London by the end of February 2006, in time for the LAA to come into operation on 1 April 2006. Members heard that the LAA set a three-year programme of delivery.
- Responding to questions from Members, officers explained that the priorities within the headline indicators had been decided by Cabinet and the Harrow Strategic Partnership Board and Executives, in consultation with lead officers in relevant directorates. As yet there were no additional costs imposed on the Harrow Strategic Partnership, as the costs of the proposals were incurred in terms of time taken to develop the LAA by officers.
- Some Members expressed the view that the report contained technical uses of language which they considered to be unclear. Although they were grateful for the clarification provided by the officer present, they considered that it would be useful in future to receive reports which provided both more background information and context. Members considered that this issue had arisen as a result of reports to scrutiny committees being written in the same style as similar reports to Cabinet, and suggested that because of the differing roles of each body, a different approach in drafting and presenting reports be adopted. It was resolved that this issue be raised with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a general comment on reports presented to Scrutiny Sub-Committees. The Chair also proposed that the Sub-Committee receive a follow-up report on the LAA at its March 2006 meeting.
- RESOLVED:** That (1) the report be noted;

(2) the appropriateness of this style of report for Scrutiny purposes be raised with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;

(3) the Sub-Committee receive a follow-up report on the LAA at its March 2006 meeting.

187. **Any Other Business:**

The Chair tabled a list of items to be included in the agenda of the meeting scheduled for 29 November 2005. Due to the large volume of work, it was suggested that, if Members were in agreement, an additional meeting be held. Dates proposed to the Sub-Committee were 21 November and 5 December 2005.

RESOLVED: That (1) a special meeting of the Sub-Committee be held on 5 December 2005;

(2) the Portfolio Holders for Planning, Development and Housing, and Environment and Transport be invited to attend either the 29 November 2005 or 5 December 2005 meeting.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 8.50 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR ALAN BLANN
Chair