

HARROW BUSINESS CONSULTATIVE PANEL

26 SEPTEMBER 2005

Chair: * Councillor Choudhury

Councillors: * Idaikkadar
* Kara

Myra Michael

* Denotes Member present

[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**1. **Appointment of Chair:**

RESOLVED: To note the appointment, at the Cabinet meeting on 19 May 2005, of Councillor Choudhury as Chair of the Panel for the 2005/2006 Municipal Year.

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

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Idaikkadar as Vice-Chair of the Panel for the 2005/2006 Municipal Year.

3. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance at this meeting.

4. **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.

5. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

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

6. **Public Representations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rules 18, 15 and 16 (Part 4B of the Constitution) respectively.

7. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2005, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

8. **Matters Arising from the Minutes:**

The Chair noted that the responses to questions raised at previous meetings of the Forum were included in the agenda pack, for information. No other matters arose.

RESOLVED: That the above be noted.

9. **Welcome to the Meeting:**

The Chair welcomed Members, officers and representatives of the Business Community in Harrow to the meeting. He explained that this was the first meeting of the Harrow Business Consultative Forum, formerly the National Non-Domestic Ratepayers Consultative Forum. The Business Consultative Forum had been established to extend consultation with the business community to wider issues, beyond the statutory annual consultation on the Council's budget proposals. The Chair informed the meeting that the Forum would still undertake this statutory duty.

RESOLVED: That the above be noted.

10. **Introduction to the Meeting:**

Councillor Dighé, the Portfolio Holder for Business Connections and Performance, addressed the meeting and explained that his portfolio covered relationships between the Council and businesses. He added that the Forum was important for the development of a strong partnership between the Council and its business community. He emphasised the need for consultation that would inform the Council which services were important to businesses and how these services could be improved.

In the discussion that followed, a business representative questioned the Portfolio Holder on the Council's consultation with small businesses over procurement. The Portfolio Holder referred to the business portal which enabled businesses, once registered, to receive pre-notification of contracts for tender. He also referred to seminars and open events organised to advertise the business portal, and suggested that a demonstration could be organised for any interested parties. The representative suggested that small businesses should be provided with an opportunity to bid for contracts as a consortium.

A representative expressed concern that businesses were not offered exemptions from the controlled parking zones (CPZs) across the Borough, although a Member of the Panel advised that businesses could receive exemptions. Further concern was raised over the impact of the extension of the Stanmore CPZ on local businesses. It was suggested the concerns should be directed to the Traffic and Road Safety Advisory Panel.

RESOLVED: That the above be noted.

11. **Harrow's Relationship with the Business Community:**

The meeting received three verbal presentations from officers of the Council.

Contacts with the Business Community

The meeting was provided with an overview of the Council's relationship with its business community. Strategies and reviews to develop and improve this relationship were outlined, including:

- A mapping exercise to provide a comprehensive picture of businesses in Harrow;
- Developments in engagement and consultation, including the launch of the Harrow Business Consultative Panel and ongoing consultation in relation to the development of the business portal;
- Initiatives to support growth in the business sector, such as a review of the impact of Harrow's new tourism strategy on business activity and an assessment of the need for a new incubator site;
- Monitoring best practice across other boroughs and joint working with the West London Alliance;
- The development of an detailed action plan for business engagement over the next 2-3 years.

Officers requested that business representatives provide advice to the meeting on how the Council should consult with them most effectively.

Harrow Business Community Portal

The meeting received an update on the Business Community Portal, 'Smart Connections', recently launched to encourage growth in the local business community. Officers navigated the links within the three main sections of the Business Portal (www.harrow.co.uk/business):

1. **Business Services and Support** – this section provided help, advice and guidance on business issues, including: information on business finance; commercial properties available to businesses; health and safety courses provided by the Council; and other relevant information.
2. **Doing Business with Harrow Council** – this section advertised the Council's current procurement contracts, and allowed businesses to view contracts available for tender, receive pre-tender advice and view historical tenders. It was suggested that smaller businesses could use this section to identify larger organisations who had received contracts that could be approached for sub-contracting work.

3. **Directory of Harrow Businesses** – this section enabled businesses to register with the portal. Officers described it as providing an ‘extra shop window’ for businesses. It was added that business could register an interest in certain types of contracts, and receive update emails when a tender became available.

It was emphasised that the success of the portal would depend heavily on take-up amongst the business community. 4000 leaflets would be circulated to businesses to advertise the portal, and feedback would be encouraged to enable the site to be improved. The meeting was informed of the expected benefits of the portal on different segments of the business community. The success of the site would be ascertained through monitoring web data and survey results.

Visiting Harrow: London’s Newest Attraction

The Forum received a presentation on Harrow’s new tourism strategy. It was informed that the strategy was particularly important to Harrow with regard to new and upcoming developments in the area, including:

- success in the Olympic bid;
- the completion of Wembley Stadium in 2006; and
- developments in transport links including the expansion of Heathrow Airport and the Channel Tunnel.

To ensure that Harrow’s local economy benefited from the developments, ‘putting Harrow on the map’ had become one of the Council’s key corporate priorities. The Council had plans to regenerate both the Town Centre and open spaces across the Borough. The key tourism strengths of the Borough were described, including:

- ‘village life’ in areas such as Pinner and Harrow on the Hill;
- heritage attractions including Bentley Priory, Grim’s Dyke Hotel, Headstone Manor and Harrow Museum;
- traditional events such as May Day festivities and diversity events such as Under One Sky and Harrow Arts Festival.

The Council’s tourism vision involved ‘putting Harrow on the map’ and increasing awareness of the Harrow brand. It was hoped that this would then create more civic pride, strengthen communities and achieve prosperity in the local community. Partnership working was considered crucial for the success of the strategy. Harrow Tourism Forum had been established to provide a Forum for stakeholders to meet quarterly and feedback on the strategy.

Four key areas were developed for long-term growth:

1. **Market development** – including developing the Harrow brand, conducting research using the new Economic Impact Model from the London Development Agency, using this information to target identified tourist markets and increasing press coverage.
2. **Product development** – increasing the range of visitor attractions and implementing a Tourist Information Centre.
3. **Quality enhancement** – to welcome and satisfy the visitor, by providing good quality accommodation, signage, visitor maps and maintaining the grounds of historical attractions.
4. **Training and development** – supporting local businesses, especially in the hospitality industry, by providing the required training and development needed to support tourism growth.

The meeting was informed of the Council’s achievements in 2005, including: launch of the tourism strategy; support from both the local and national press; increased activity in the town centre; and restoration work at heritage sites including Headstone Manor and Cannons Park.

With expanding transport links and the successful Olympic bid, it was anticipated that Harrow would greatly benefit from increased tourism, provided that the infrastructure was developed now through the tourism strategy.

Questions and Answers

Further to the presentations, the Forum received questions and comments from the business representatives, which were answered by officers and Members present.

A representative suggested that disabled access to Harrow on the Hill station was a big problem for people trying to access Harrow. The meeting was informed that improved access at Harrow on the Hill station was a current priority for London Underground.

A representative queried what funding could be provided to smaller businesses in Harrow, to allow them to compete against businesses in Brent and Ealing. Officers referred to the Business Portal, which contained a link to business funding opportunities available.

In response to a query, the meeting was informed that registration to the business portal was free of charge. Officers further advised that the Council did not operate an 'approved list' system for procurement contracts with the Council, and that all tenders were approved from scratch.

A major concern of representatives was that a lack of free car parking in Harrow limited access to local businesses. A representative suggested that Harrow could not compete with areas like Brent Cross, which provided free parking to its customers. A Member advised that the high car ownership in Harrow placed competing demands on the parking spaces available in the area. Although public transport was recommended as a viable alternative to cars, a representative believed that public transport prevented customers from browsing smaller shops in more remote areas. It was further suggested that public transport was inconvenient for local journeys. Making Harrow more accessible to vehicles was considered a high priority if Harrow was to improve tourism. It was suggested that a car park which provided free spaces for customers of the local shops would provide a solution. It was further recommended that car parking restrictions should be consistent within an area.

In response to queries about free parking in Harrow, the Chair informed the meeting that car parks in North Harrow and Wealdstone (including the Peel multi-storey car park) offered first hour free car parking, and that Kenton Road was pay and display with free off-street parking on Mayfield Avenue and Willowfield Avenue except between 11am and noon.

Although Members noted that the New Harrow Project was aiming to make Harrow 'cleaner, greener and safer', a representative was still critical of the level of cleanliness in Harrow's streets and said that this would deter tourists.

A representative was interested to know how to exploit business opportunities created by the opening of Wembley Park Stadium. Officers stated that the Council was in talks with Brent to incorporate promotional marketing into brochures created by Brent, especially promoting accommodation in Harrow. The representative was advised to contact the Council for more specific opportunities relating to his business.

In addition, a representative submitted five written questions, and it was agreed that the Director of Financial and Business Strategy would arrange for written responses to be forwarded to the representative.

RESOLVED: That the above be noted.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.35 pm, closed at 9.05 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR MRINAL CHOUDHURY
Chair

APPENDIX 1

HARROW BUSINESS CONSULTATIVE PANEL – 26 SEPTEMBER 2005**(1) Representatives of the Business Community who Attended**

D Greenwood	Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)
A Campos	McDonalds Restaurant Ltd
S Sen	SBA Ventures UK Ltd
C Backhouse	Brent and Harrow Chamber of Commerce
P Mistry	United Quest Ltd
A Watkiss	S&D Chemicals Ltd
R Legg	KEBS
C Legg	KEBS

(2) Officers who Attended

Myfanwy Barrett	Director of Financial and Business Strategy
Chander Vasdev	Business Community Manager
Linzi Clark	Tourism Officer
Laura Kell	Democratic Services Officer

