
REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD ON 12 OCTOBER 2009

Chairman:	* Councillor Stanley Sheinwald	
Councillors:	* Ms Nana Asante (3) * Mrs Camilla Bath * John Cowan * B E Gate * Mitzi Green * Jerry Miles	* Janet Mote * Paul Scott (1) * Anthony Seymour * Mrs Rekha Shah † Yogesh Teli * Mark Versallion
Voting Co-opted:	(Voluntary Aided) † Mrs J Rammelt Reverend P Reece	(Parent Governors) † Mr R Chauhan Mrs D Speel

* Denotes Member present
(1) and (3) Denote category of Reserve Members
† Denotes apologies received

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL
PART II - MINUTES

617. **Welcome:**
The Chairman welcomed the representative from the Harrow Local Involvement Network (LINK).

618. **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 Mrs Margaret Davine	Councillor Ms Nana Asante
Councillor Dinesh Solanki	Councillor Mrs Camilla Bath
Councillor Mrs Vina Mithani	Councillor John Cowan
Councillor Christopher Noyce	Councillor Paul Scott

619. **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. Community Lettings Action Plan	Councillor Stanley Sheinwald	Personal - Member of the Grants Advisory Panel. The Member remained in the room during the discussion and decision making on this item.
	Councillor Nana Asante	Personal - Member of the Grants Advisory Panel. The Member remained in the room during the discussion and decision making on this item.
	Councillor Rekha Shah	Personal - Member of the Grants Advisory Panel. The Member remained in the room during the discussion and decision making on this item.

620. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2009 be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- Councillor Janet Mote's declaration of interest for item 8 be changed to read: "Personal – Daughter currently a paediatric nurse at Northwick Park Hospital and her husband registered at Alexandra Avenue Polyclinic. The Member remained in the room during the discussion and decision making on this item";
- Councillor Nana Asante's declaration of interest for item 8 be changed to read: "Personal – Registered at Mollison Way Surgery. The Member remained in the room during the discussion and decision making on this item";
- A further sentence be added to end of paragraph 5, minute 614, reading: "A Member stated that it was important that the Committee had guarantees that Care UK staff received updated training on a regular basis".

621. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put.

622. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received.

623. **Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received.

624. **References from Council/Cabinet:**

RESOLVED: To note that there were no references.

625. **Communications Policy:**

A representative of the Harrow Local Involvement Network (LINK) explained that the Communications Policy set out the basic components required to achieve effective and appropriate communication both internally (within the LINK and its host) and externally (between the LINK and the public, service providers and stakeholders). The Communications Policy had been provided to give the Committee the opportunity to comment on its content.

Following questions from Members, the representative clarified the following points:

- Members of the Harrow LINK consisted of local people, organisations and groups from across the borough;
- the Harrow LINK aimed to provide a stronger voice for local people in the planning, designing, commissioning and provisioning of health services;
- all local authorities with responsibility for social services were charged with the responsibility of establishing a LINK for their area and procuring a host organisation to support it. Finance was provided through an annual grant from the Department of Health.

A Member raised concerns that few residents appeared to be aware of the Harrow LINK's existence and whether more work was required to publicise its function. The representative stated that financial constraints meant it was difficult to actively promote Harrow LINK, although an editorial article in Harrow People had been considered. A Member suggested that the Harrow LINK request the support of the host organisation in order to draft the proposed editorial and, if necessary, make use of the Council's editorial team. Members also recommended that the Harrow LINK explore free advertising opportunities such as GP information boards, the internet and social networking websites.

RESOLVED: That (1) the Communications Policy be noted;

(2) a letter be sent to the Portfolio Holder for Performance, Communications and Corporate Services, recommending that space be set aside in the next edition of Harrow People for an article about Harrow LINK.

626. **Protocol between Harrow Local Involvement Network and Harrow Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

A representative of the Harrow LINK explained that a protocol had been designed to guide the relationship between the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Harrow LINK, to aid communication, co-operation and understanding.

A Member commented that he was pleased that the Harrow LINK had the power to enter and view premises to ensure that services were working well. The representative clarified that such powers would only be used when investigating a particular concern.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

627. **Community Lettings Action Plan:**

An officer reported that at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28 July 2009, the Corporate Director for Community and Environment had been asked to formulate an action plan with a view to improve the Council's community lettings system. An action plan had since been formulated and aimed to improve transparency and clarity for all parties. The action plan had been divided into three strands and the officer outlined these, as set out in the report.

Following questions from Members, the officer clarified the following points:

- some schools were reluctant to support the community lettings process as they could make more money from a private letting. As such, there was a need to remind schools that they had a social duty to engage with the community lettings process;
- the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had completed its review of Council support to the voluntary sector in December 2008. As all the recommendations of the Committee had fallen within the remit of a single service area, a decision had been made to initially focus on revising the grants process. However, the community lettings process was now being dealt with and officers were committed to the proposed action plan. Officers were confident that they would meet the June 2010 deadline;
- the Council was looking to coordinate its room hire arrangements through a corporate booking system and schools were due to be considered in the second phase of this scoping exercise.

During discussion on this item, Members made the following comments:

- the Grants Advisory Panel had already made a distinction between religious activity and religious organisations, and had also accepted that religious groups supported community cohesion. The action plan proposed reviewing the situation once again and this was not necessary;
- some schools were not fulfilling the requirements of the Extended Schools Programme and Ofsted should be able to apply pressure on those that failed to engage with the process;
- the action plan was reassuring and a mapping exercise was essential in order to identify key users of the service. However, the Council should consider publicising the community lettings process so that more groups could make use of it;
- there appeared to be a lack of organisational memory, with a mapping exercise having previously taken place. Such duplication of work was delaying progress.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

628. **Local Development Framework Core Strategy - Preferred Option Document for Public Consultation:**

An officer introduced the report and explained that the Core Strategy would provide the long-term spatial vision and overarching policy framework to guide development in Harrow for the next 15 years. The Core Strategy would be the central document of the Local Development Framework (LDF) and would set the context for all future LDF documents. The officer explained that the LDF was required to make provision for future population and housing growth in the Borough while preserving the values, character and environment that residents and businesses valued. The Core Strategy identified the central area of the borough as an Intensification Area, where significant

levels of growth and change would be focused and co-ordinated. Remaining developed urban areas would see steady levels of growth.

The officer reported that the key strategic aim of the Core Strategy was to promote economic development and employment opportunities, support sustainable communities through the development of suitable housing, promote retail growth, improve the borough's infrastructure, combat climate change and improve the quality of life for residents. Full public consultation on the proposed Core Strategy was due to commence in November 2009 with the final document due to be submitted to the Secretary of State in March 2010. The final Core Strategy was expected to be adopted in April 2011.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development and Enterprise informed the Committee that the Core Strategy, unlike the Unitary Development Plan, gave the Council the ability to significantly influence the development of the borough. The Committee could help shape the document as it moved towards implementation.

In response to questions from Members, the Portfolio Holder and officers clarified the following points:

- the Council was currently exceeding its annual housing target of 400. Although the current economic climate meant that development had slowed, the ambition to build an additional 6500 homes by 2026 was considered realistic;
- whilst only 147 responses from the initial public consultation had been received, the Council had met and exceeded the statutory requirements when consulting upon the preferred option. It was hoped that local residents would be more willing to engage with the process as the Core Strategy neared completion. At present most responses were from community groups and resident associations;
- the Core Strategy was a central document of the LDF and it was not expected that it would change significantly during its lifetime. Additional LDF documents such as development management policies that supported the Core Strategy would be regularly reviewed. If necessary these would be revised to ensure the LDF remained fit for purpose. The LDF was also subject to formal annual monitoring and reporting;
- the Secretary of State was able to reject the Council's Core Strategy if it was felt that the document was not deliverable or was based on flawed evidence. However, the Council had taken advice from the Planning Inspectorate and had been advised that, at present, the proposed approach was fundamentally sound;
- in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance (PPG2), there was a presumption against development in greenbelt areas. Where there were no existing developments in a greenbelt area, no development could take place unless a developer could demonstrate exceptional circumstances. However, in areas where there had been some previous development, redevelopment could take place where it accorded to guidance in PPG2;
- the Greater London Authority (GLA) had a responsibility to ensure delivery of the LDF. The Council intended to work closely with the London Development Agency (LDA) and Design for London in order to ensure that future development in the borough was both technically sound and aesthetically pleasing. With the support of the GLA, the Council intended to work closely with Transport for London (TfL) in order to improve the borough's infrastructure;
- whilst the Core Strategy would not prohibit the development of tall buildings in the borough, such buildings were likely not to be permitted if they were likely to significantly impact on the character of an area. The Council was working with the GLA to create a 3D model of the proposed Intensification Area so that proposed developments could be simulated and the potential impact on the area made clear to both the Council and residents;
- an affordable housing target had been agreed with the GLA of 218 units. In addition, the Council was aiming to address the need for larger socially rented units. It was acknowledged that a mix of housing was required and location was a key issue that needed to be carefully considered;

- the Council had adopted its Accessible Homes document in 2006. Developers were required to adhere to certain principles when designing properties to ensure that individuals with limited mobility were catered for;
- development within the Intensification Area would take place on brownfield sites. One problem currently faced by the Council was that private gardens were classified as brownfield sites and it was difficult to stop owners developing on the land. However, the Core Strategy would allow the Council to resist development proposals if they were not in keeping with the character of the area;
- the Core Strategy would aim to ensure a mix of housing. The Council was currently undertaking capacity work to ensure that the ratio of houses and flats within the borough remained balanced and suitable for local needs;
- the provision of car parking for new developments would depend on many factors including design and location. However, the Council did intend to proceed with a constrained parking policy, especially for properties located near transport hubs.

The Committee raised concern that so few had responded to the initial public consultation and suggested that the Council needed to reconsider how it engaged with residents. A Member recommended that the Council should actively seek out opportunities to consult with established groups, such as resident associations. The Member also recommended that the literature distributed in the next stage of the consultation process be presented in a manner that made the information more understandable. In response, an officer informed Members that the Council was looking to improve the next stage of the consultation process. This would include increased promotion and the provision of public workshops and events to allow residents to better understand how the proposals would impact on their area. In addition, the Council would be engaging with a number of existing forums in order to actively seek opinions. The LDF Team were also engaging three members of staff, with expertise in public consultation and engagement with residents, to improve the consultation process.

RESOLVED: That (1) the report be noted;

(2) the above comments on the Local Development Framework Core Strategy – Preferred Option Document for Public Consultation, be submitted to Cabinet.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 10.10 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR STANLEY SHEINWALD
Chairman