



## **HARROW STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD**

### **Future of the Partnership Board**

**23<sup>rd</sup> September 2013**

#### **Introduction**

At their last meeting, the Partnership Board considered a report on the future of the Board itself. The report highlighted the decline in the relevance of the Board since the abolition of the Local Area Agreement (LAA) in 2010, the tendency for pan-London organisations to look for efficiencies by combining functions across geographical areas rather than across sectors and the experience of a number of other Boroughs which had given up formal Partnership Boards in favour of thematic working partnerships. The report presented the Board with three options:

1. Continue the existing arrangements,
2. Devise a better version of the Harrow Assembly to replace the Board,
3. Use the Health and Wellbeing Board and Safer Harrow as the principle partnership vehicles underpinned by Harrow Chief Executives.

#### **Proposed Action**

That in the light of the further consideration given to the comments raised both at the last meeting of the Board and subsequently, and the clarifications and proposals included in this report, it is recommended that the Board that it no longer meets with effect from the end of their next scheduled meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2013.

#### **Partnership Board consideration in July 2013**

In their discussions regarding the merits and disadvantages of each option, Board members made the following comments:

- the Board currently benefited from representation from different sectors and varied areas of expertise, and it was important for the Council to preserve this interaction;
- in the past, the work of the Board had provided value to the work of the Council and other partner organisations;
- Board meetings facilitated strategic working and the widest possible debate of issues under consideration;
- the Board had not made any substantive decisions or produced any concrete outcomes in the past three years and attendance at meetings was generally poor. Loss of funding had diminished its purpose;

- the Board had no decision-making power, and if it were to continue, then its terms of reference should be amended to facilitate this requirement;
- the Board had forged links and established relationships within the borough and these should be maintained. If the Board were to continue, it would require amended terms of reference, improved attendance at meetings and a concrete agenda with items for consideration suggested by all Board members. In view of which, Board members may feel it would be preferable to make more effective use of other existing groups such as the Health and Wellbeing Board;
- NHS partners valued the opportunity for partnership work which was afforded by the Board, however, reduced capacity and funding would impact on their ability to attend all of the partnership bodies so it was important that those that remained were effective;
- it was the Borough Commander's priority to make Harrow the safest borough in London and he would welcome the opportunity to explore with the Council and Board members how this could be achieved;
- representatives from the voluntary sector stated that the voluntary sector co-optees on the Health and Wellbeing Board had an advisory role and were not full voting members. Membership of the Board allowed this group to have a direct input into the Council and other partners. Additionally, dissolution of the Board could affect the standing of partner members on other bodies and they sought clarity on this. In the case of the Voluntary and Community sector, clarity was also sought on whether the dissolution of the HSP would also mean the loss of the funding contribution to the administrator's role and loss of the option of cost-free booking of committee rooms at the Civic Centre. The Chief Executive responded that, in his view, voluntary sector partners should be full, voting members of other key groups and he would look into enabling this;
- Board members, many of whom by virtue of their membership of the Board, were members of other bodies, had a valuable contribution to make and represented a useful source of local information. The Board's terms of reference, should it be maintained, should be updated to take into consideration changing circumstances;
- the Joint Analytical Tasking and Action Group (JATAG) was an example of successful working between partners. JATAG had a wide membership, agenda items could be proposed by all members of the Group, it worked collaboratively on problem-solving for operational issues and had decision-making powers. However, the Group was already quite large and the inclusion of any additional members would make it less effective. The Harrow Town Centre Forum was also an example of decision-making body with the power to implement decisions;
- it was pointed out however, that the HSP was a strategic body, whereas JATAG was a tasking group which had the power to both make and implement operational decisions;
- in the past, the Board had played a valuable role and enabled information sharing. However, it had not evolved to the decision making stage. In recent years, lack of funding, poor attendance at meetings and duplication of its work had meant that the Board had had a decreasing impact. In the light of the above, it would be important to review the Board's governance, membership, capacity and resources. In the future, it may be more appropriate that important, strategic issues become the remit of other groups such as the Health and Wellbeing Board and Harrow Chief Executives.

It was agreed that a further report reflecting on these comments and shaped through further dialogue with Board members on their views, should be submitted to the Board's next meeting in September.

## **Further Work**

Since the Board's meeting in July, Officers have held meetings with as many of the existing Board members as possible to explore in further detail their thoughts on the future of the Board, their concerns if it were to cease and the value they placed on partnership working.

A number of detailed issues, in some cases similar to the points raised at the last Board have been discussed and, in many cases, resolved. For example, the issues regarding the status of the "HSP Reps" from the Voluntary and Community Sector Forum, the continuation of funding, and access to Civic Centre meeting rooms have been clarified to the satisfaction of the sector representatives.

At a more strategic level, there has been a general acceptance that the Board has become less effective since the abolition of the LAA but that there is an undiminished appetite for partnership working. In most cases, the Board is not seen as an essential element of partnership working and of less importance than a committed partnership attitude and willingness to meet and discuss constructively opportunities and problems.

Specific comments (paraphrased) from officers' discussions include:

- We need to develop Safer Harrow to be able to deliver the aspiration of making Harrow the safest Borough in London which will require the active co-operation and support of public, private and voluntary sector organisations. The Board has not contributed very much to improving community safety – Borough Commander
- There is a need for a body to oversee and co-ordinate regeneration activity and employment and skills work but the Board has not made a substantive contribution to this agenda – Further Education Representative
- The Board provides an opportunity for representatives of different sectors and organisations to contribute to debate. However, the reduction in the capacity of the Board to influence change that has accompanied the abolition of the LAA and austerity, may require an alternative approach to enabling constructive dialogue. Any alternative model needs to ensure that the voluntary and community sector, and in particular, smaller organisations, have a platform to enable their voice to be heard – Councillor Perry
- The Board does provide a platform for the voluntary and community sector's views to be shared. However, the agenda of the Board has been of limited interest and generated almost entirely by the Council – despite requests for other sectors to bring forward issues. Providing the arrangements for meetings with the Leader and Chief Executive and support for the Voluntary Sector Forum continue and the membership (with voting rights) of the Health and Wellbeing Board and Safer Harrow is guaranteed, the proposal to abolish the Board would not be of great concern. There will need to be alternative arrangements for overseeing the Compact – Voluntary and Community Sector representatives

- The health related debates that were once a feature of the Board now take place in the Health and Wellbeing Board. From a health perspective, the loss of the Board would not be a major concern – Health representatives
- The most important thing is that there is effective partnership work to support economic development and business. The form that this partnership work takes is less critical. Networking opportunities should be preserved if at all possible - Business Representatives

## Considerations

Taking the comments made at the last meeting together with those collected in officer discussions with Board members, there are three issues that come to the fore that would need to be resolved before there could be consensus or at least acceptance that the Board should no longer meet:

- Maintaining the diversity of view, enabling wide debate on issues of concern, facilitating partnership working and continuing and strengthening the links forged by the Partnership Board and the Partnership in the widest sense;
- Providing a focus for regeneration, economic development, jobs and skills; and
- Developing a mechanism for the maintenance and management of the Compact.

On the first point, there are a number of existing mechanisms that could pick up the continuation and development of partnership working including an expanded Harrow Chief Executives group to provide a more comprehensive strategic forum for understanding the issues facing Harrow and the opportunities to work better together. It is intended that summits, the large public events held periodically around one or two specific issues, would continue at least annually and more often if required. The Membership of both Safer Harrow and the Health and Wellbeing Board can be reviewed to ensure diversity of views is represented and the status of voluntary sector representatives will be reviewed.

Secondly, it is proposed to re-launch Enterprising Harrow, a sub-group of the former Sustainable Development and Enterprise Management Group. The re-launched group with an extended and more strategic membership would be responsible for supporting the West London Alliance Community Budget work on regeneration and economic development, jobs and skills as well as advocating for the needs of business and addressing provision for young people not in education Employment or training (NEETs). Revised terms of reference and membership proposals will be submitted to Harrow Chief Executives for approval.

The Compact describes the working relationship between public and voluntary and community sector organisations. It is an agreement “owned” by the Partnership and complaints that the Compact might have been infringed are investigated and reported to the Board. It is proposed that, in the event of the Board no longer meeting, the Compact should be jointly managed by Harrow Chief Executives and the Voluntary and Community Sector Forum. Proposals to update the Compact would be considered by both bodies and the outcome of complaint investigations reported to both as well. The scale of Compact activity is not onerous with only one complaint registered in the last 18 months and the transfer of this responsibility should not over burden either of the proposed successor bodies.