

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	16 February 2006
Subject:	Scrutiny Review of Community Engagement
Responsible Officer:	Director of People, Performance and Policy
Contact Officer:	Bindu Arjoon
Portfolio Holder:	Communications, Partnership and Human Resources
Key Decision:	No
Status:	Part 1

Section 1: Summary

Decision Required

Cabinet are asked to:

- i. Endorse those recommendations of the Scrutiny Review of Community Engagement that are consistent with the Council's Corporate Community Engagement Strategy, endorsed by Cabinet in December 2005;
- ii. Agree to receive a report after next May, indicating how the remaining Scrutiny Review recommendations, not addressed in the Strategy may be implemented.

Reason for report

Harrow Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee undertook a review of Community Engagement across the council, in 2005. Within the same timescale, the Council's Corporate Community Engagement Strategy was developed. Officers and members involved in the review and the development of the Strategy worked closely together. This report identifies the extent to which the Corporate Community Engagement Strategy addresses Scrutiny's recommendations.

Benefits

Community Engagement is at the heart of both Central Government and Local Government's agenda. The Scrutiny Review identifies areas where the council may be able to improve its practice and therefore be in a position to engage with Harrow's communities in a more effective and efficient way. Good quality engagement is also likely to have a positive impact on customer satisfaction with the council's services.

Cost of Proposals

There is a budget of £50,000 for the delivery of the action plan attached to the Community Engagement Strategy.

Risks

There may be a financial implication attached to the adoption of the Scrutiny recommendations not currently covered in the Community Engagement Strategy. Officers propose that these be considered by the next political administration after May 2006. The outcome of these considerations can be used to inform the first year review of the Community Engagement Strategy, which is scheduled for January 2007.

Implications if recommendations rejected

The council should make every effort to ensure that its community engagement principles are translated into action as there is likely to be damage to the council's reputation based on the publicity given to the development of the Community Engagement Strategy and the Scrutiny review, including direct involvement from the public as individuals and members of the community and voluntary sector.

Section 2: Report

2.1 The Council has worked over the last year to develop its Corporate Community Engagement Strategy, working closely with members of the Harrow Strategic Partnership as well as colleagues from the community and voluntary sector. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee commenced its review of Community Engagement in the summer of 2005.

Officers developing the Strategy worked closely with the Scrutiny review group and as a result, a substantial amount of the recommendations made by Scrutiny are reflected in the Strategy and will be addressed by the following main parts of the Action Plan associated with the Strategy:

a) Development of a Consultation Database

During current service planning activity, Executive Directorates are identifying consultation they intend to conduct over the next three years. This information will be developed into a database that will be supplemented by the Link Officers Group (described below). The results of consultation and engagement activities

will also inform the database so that there is a record of the views already expressed. This will reduce duplication of effort and resources as well as address issues of consultation fatigue. It is anticipated that in the medium term, members of the Harrow Strategic Partnership (HSP) will also contribute information to the database.

b) Development of an Engagement Toolkit

This will involve the development of best practice guidance which can be used by officers, elected members and members of the community and voluntary sector.

c) Capacity Building Programme for the Community and Voluntary Sector.

It is recognised that the council asks the Community and Voluntary Sector to undertake engagement activities on its behalf, in acknowledgement of the fact that often they will be more effective in reaching those groups who public bodies find particularly difficult to engage. However feedback from the sector indicates that there are issues that need to be addressed around capacity and experience to be able to fulfil this responsibility. The capacity building programme will work to develop appropriate capacity building exercises, in partnership with the sector.

d) (Community Engagement) Link Officers Group

To support the implementation of a) to c) above, a Link Officers Group comprising representation from services across the council has been developed. The group will work to ensure that the database is developed and populated, best practice is disseminated within service areas and that the toolkit is meaningful for intended users based on service needs. It is intended that

representatives from partner organisations will join the Group to work towards consistency in engagement practice across the Harrow Strategic Partnership.

There are two major areas where the Scrutiny Review has made recommendations not addressed in the Strategy. These include issues relates to Youth Services and Area Committees. Officers recommend that these be considered by the next political administration after May 2005, as they involve significant policy decisions.

2.2 Options considered

Consideration was given to halting the development of the Community Engagement Strategy pending the conclusion of the Scrutiny Review. However it was important to begin to address those issues that the council was already aware of, from past consultation exercises.

2.3 Consultation

Consultation has been undertaken by the Scrutiny Review Group as outlined in the attached report. Consultation with elected members, the Scrutiny Review Group, the Harrow Strategic Partnership and individual community and voluntary sector organisations was also conducted during the development of the Community Engagement Strategy.

2.4 Financial Implications

The costs of the delivery of the action plan attached to the Community Engagement Strategy will need to be contained within the approved budget provision of £50,000.

2.5 Legal Implications

The Constitution (Overview and Scrutiny Rule 16) provides for the Executive to consider a report of the scrutiny review group and to determine recommendations thereon.

2.6 Equalities Impact

Implementation of the principles of community engagement as identified in the Scrutiny Review and Community Engagement Strategy will ensure that all residents of Harrow are given the opportunity and tools to be able to engagement with the council.

2.7 Section 17 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Considerations

Evidence has shown that fear of crime is a significant issue in the borough. Effective engagement with residents will allow the council and its partners to identify the key drivers for fear of crime and allow for information on crime and safety issues to be communicated to residents.

Section 3: Supporting Information/Background Documents

Appendix 1 – Report considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
(circulated in the Cabinet Supporting Documents Pack)

Appendix 2 – Reference from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Council's Corporate Community Engagement Strategy is available from the
Policy and Partnerships Service on 020 8424 1393.

For further information:

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