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| Meeting:             | Overview & Scrutiny (SPECIAL)                      |
| Date:                | 10 January 2006                                    |
| Subject:             | Hear/Say – Scrutiny Review of Community Engagement |
| Responsible Officer: | Director of People, Performance & Policy           |
| Contact Officer:     | Frances Hawkins, Scrutiny Officer                  |
| Portfolio Holder:    | Communications, Partnership & Human Resources      |
| Key Decision:        | No   |
| Status:              | Part I (Public)                                    |

## **Section 1: Summary**

### **Decision Required**

The Committee is asked to

- 1 consider and agree the report of the review group;
- 2 refer the report to the earliest possible Cabinet meeting;
- 3 agree the publication and dissemination of the report and its findings;
- 4 request a progress report on action taken in 6 months time.

## **Reason for report**

To report back to O&S on the outcome of the scrutiny review and to seek the Committee's agreement that the report should be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

## **Benefits**

Community engagement is central to the government's vision for the future of local government. It is also essential to the provision of services which meet the needs of local communities and in addressing issues of social cohesion in a way which is sustainable and makes a difference to the quality of life of local residents.

The review group has identified a number of ways in which the Council can improve its engagement practices. Referral of the report to Cabinet will support the Executive in its current work in developing and taking forward the Community Engagement Strategy.

## **Cost of Proposals**

The cost implications for scrutiny in publishing this report will be contained within existing budgets. Wider cost implications associated with addressing and adopting any of the recommendations from the review will need to be examined by the Executive.

## **Risks**

Failure to adopt the report of the review group will mean that the Executive will not have the opportunity to give full consideration to the recommendations in time for inclusion in the budget proposals for 2006/07, to the potential detriment of the local community.

It could also impact adversely on the Council's Corporate Performance Assessment and weaken the Council's work towards the development of sustainable and cohesive communities.

## **Implications if recommendations rejected**

The review will not be progressed any further in its current form. The good practice recommendations will not be considered any further and the opportunities to influence the implementation of the Council's Community Engagement Strategy will be reduced.

## **Section 2: Report**

### 2.1 Brief History

2.1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that a review of community engagement should be included in its 2005/06 work programme. It agreed the scope of the review at its meeting held on 19 July 2005.

2.1.2 The Committee agreed that the review should be jointly led by a Councillor and a member of the community. The Committee agreed to appoint Julia Smith from the Harrow Association of Voluntary Services as the joint community lead of the review. This is the first time that a member of the community has been involved in leading a scrutiny review. The two case studies which were undertaken as part of the review also had joint Councillor & community leads. These arrangements have proved very successful, with the review benefiting enormously from this community input.

### 2.2 Options considered

2.2.1 A range of options were considered in the selection of the case studies.

### 2.3 Consultation

2.3.1 There has been widespread consultation during the review, using a variety of methods. This has included the following consultations:

- members of the public - face-to face, at events, a focus group, and the Community Consultative Forum, by phone, letter and email phone and through the experimental messageboard
- staff at all levels, including frontline staff, middle managers, Directors and the Chief Executive
- Councillors, including the Leader, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holders

### Financial Implications

2.4 The costs associated with the publication of the Hear/Say report will be contained within existing budgets. The recommendations of the review could have significant resource implications which the Council will need to consider in the context of its budget making process. The grants recommendations will need to be considered as part of the 2007/08 budget process.

### Legal Implications

2.5 Part I of the Local Government Act 2000 places on local authorities a duty to prepare community strategies for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their areas. Government guidance

on community strategies states that one of the guiding principles is to engage and involve local communities. This report identifies a number of ways in which the Council can improve its engagement practices.

## 2.6 Equalities Impact

2.6.1 One of the case studies undertaken has focussed on engagement with socially excluded groups. The review has also recognised the important role of community engagement in addressing issues of social cohesion.

## 2.7 Section 17 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Considerations

2.7.1 No specific considerations.

## **Section 3: Supporting Information/ Background Documents**

Supporting Information: Report of the Review Group

Background Documents: Report to and minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19 July 2005

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers should telephone 020 8424 9202.