

**Hear/Say – Scrutiny Review of Community Engagement**

**Reference from special meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
held on 10 January 2006**

1. The Committee received a report from the Director of People, Performance and Policy, which set out the outcome of a review of community engagement, Hear/Say – making a difference through listening and talking. The report detailed the importance of effective community engagement which met the needs of local communities, addressed issues of social cohesion and revitalised local democratic processes. The report stated that the government had rightly placed community engagement and neighbourhood renewal at the heart of its vision for the future of local government.
2. Members noted that the Chair and a representative from the Harrow Association of Voluntary Services had jointly led the review. As part of the review, case studies on Social Inclusion and Traffic were undertaken and Councillors and community representatives had led these jointly. The Committee expressed its pride that community representatives had been involved, for the first time, to lead on a scrutiny review, which had proved successful. There was consensus that the review had benefited enormously from the direct involvement of community representatives and the input from the community as a whole, which had been sought through a range of methods. There had been cross-party representation from all political groups on the review and on the case studies undertaken.
3. Before receiving a presentation on the review, the Committee noted that the Corporate Management Team (CMT) had welcomed and commended the review. The Committee was informed that the CMT had indicated that the recommendations would be taken forward and that an action plan would be prepared. It was understood that the Committee would work alongside the CMT and the 'Hear/Say Scrutiny Review Group' had agreed to continue, in its current form, to assist as a reference group in the development and implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy.
4. During the presentation from Members and community representatives involved in the review, the Committee noted, inter alia, the following points:-
  - the Community Engagement Spectrum – the need to listen, involve, and keep the community informed. To empower the community by placing the final decision making in their hands. The need to recognise that people were multi-faceted;
  - what Engagement was not about – 'consulting' without giving the full picture and when decisions had already been made, playing politics, not explaining decisions after 'consultation' and defining people/communities;

- that the review had shown that changes were needed in a number of areas in order to engage effectively with the community. There was also a need to redefine the role of Councillors in terms of the government's Vibrant Local Leadership Agenda;
- the cultural and structure changes – the need to mark/celebrate certain initiatives such as the Local Democracy Week, and to assist and provide information on how the community could engage with the Council's decision-making process;
- grant funding – the need to adopt good practice from other local authorities. A Member commended the model used by Ealing Council on grant funding and recommended that Harrow Council should adopt this;
- enhancing Engagement – to ensure that opportunities for excellence existed and that trust was built up on;
- information – the need to move away from 'silo' working was highlighted;
- inclusion – in order to avoid the problems associated with the ripple effect;
- transparency – the need to give full detailed reports on decisions and to review schemes in the public arena were mentioned;
- that consultation should not be confrontational and that there was a need to engage with the unengaged.

5. The Committee was informed that there were three key messages for Harrow on Community Engagement:-

- it was critical in raising satisfaction scores. Shared ownership was important and that, whilst the Council could not seek to empower every person in Harrow, it could seek to engage at every level;
- it was essential to the success of the Business Transformation Partnership (BTP), a ground breaking contract between the Council and Capita to transform the services provided by Harrow at the point of delivery. The BTP processes could facilitate re-engagement;
- it was an 'invest to save' project. That effective engagement would improve satisfaction scores and that the Council should work with the community.

6. The Committee also heard from representatives of Media4Life, a company that prided itself in 'creating a vision for the success of young people'. They spoke about the importance of engaging with the young, how it could be done, related their own experiences and commented on how young people could be engaged in the political process.

7. The Committee agreed the recommendations arising from the review, including those from the social inclusion and traffic studies. It was noted that the report of the review group would be submitted to Cabinet at the earliest opportunity for consideration. Members were informed that the review would be launched independently and that it was intended to make it interactive and welcoming.

8. The Chair thanked all Members, community representatives and officers involved in the review for their work. Members also thanked the public who had given up their time and taken the trouble to give their views on the review.

**RESOLVED:** That (1) the report of the review group be agreed;

**(2) the report be referred to the earliest possible Cabinet meeting;**

(3) the publication and dissemination of the report of the review group and its findings be agreed;

(4) a progress report on the action taken be submitted in six months' time.

### **FOR CONSIDERATION**

Background Papers: Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 10 January 2006.

Officer Report on Hear/Say – Scrutiny Review of Community Engagement

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