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Scrutiny Review
of Community
Engagement

Scrutiny is an independent, councillor-led function
working with local people to improve services



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2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Central Government has rightly placed community engagement and neighbourhood arrangements at the heart of its vision for the future of local government. Effective community engagement is essential to the provision of services which meet the needs of local communities, as well as to addressing issues of social cohesion and revitalising local democratic processes. Other key drivers for engaging with the community include public demand (as demonstrated by the Community Budget Group and the Open Budget Process) and the strengthening of local communities.
- 2.2 Harrow has a long history of engaging with its local communities. It established the Harrow Partnership and maintains its strong commitment to the Harrow Strategic Partnership, on which the voluntary sector is represented. However, whilst we have seen some examples of good practices, our work has shown that, overall, the Council does not have a good track record of engaging effectively with the community. Most engagement activities currently fall at the lower end of the generally recognised spectrum of community engagement (see Appendix 3). Although there are also examples of collaborative working, often with individuals with long-standing contacts with the Council, examples of involvement or empowerment are rare. The community as a whole is little inclined to involve itself in Council affairs, generally leaving the ‘usual suspects’ or representatives from special interest groups to provide the public input.
- 2.3 This situation is not, of course, unique to Harrow. Many authorities nationwide find themselves faced with similar challenges. Harrow, however, is fortunate in that it already leads the field in some areas of true engagement. Its track record includes its work on the transfer of the Rayners Lane Estate to Warden Housing Association and the Community Budget Group/Open Budget Process. Harrow is developing the Business Transformation project, which will bring further opportunities to better inform citizens and officers, thereby empowering both. It is also fortunate in having a well-educated and interested community which is willing to be involved and wants to influence decisions. Harrow has now structured itself to deliver services on an area basis. It is, therefore, well-positioned to build on its existing strengths for the benefit of the community.
- 2.4 In addition to national changes in society as a whole and general disillusionment with democratic processes, as demonstrated by the low turnouts both at general and local elections, there are a number of specific reasons for the current failure to engage effectively in Harrow.
- 2.5 Previous experiences have made some members of the public cynical of the Council’s intentions to really listen to people and to act upon their views. There is a perceived lack of honesty in the way that engagement activities are carried out and there is certainly, sometimes, a lack of transparency about our processes. Furthermore, there is often a failure to feedback results of engagement activities/consultations with scant attention paid to explaining clearly and honestly why particular routes are being followed at all stages of the engagement and the

key factors which led to decisions taken. These factors combined often lead much of the community to feel that it is neither respected nor valued.

- 2.6 To improve we believe that the Council must address two fundamental issues. Firstly, it must ensure that community engagement becomes integral to the operation of the organisation and is no longer seen as an 'add on' to Councillors' and officers' day jobs. Secondly, the Council needs to put in place proper and appropriate structures to support this new approach to working with the community. This will involve cultural, tactical and operational change, with dedicated resources and at least pump priming funding until the changes have become embedded within the mainstream culture of the organisation.
- 2.7 Our work has led us to the conclusion that the authorities that are most successful in engaging with their communities are those which have a clear strategic and corporate commitment to effective engagement, resulting in opportunities to do so being genuinely embraced.
- 2.8 We have seen examples of staff, on the individual level, displaying a tremendous commitment to improving the way that the authority works with local communities. However, we have found that, until recently, there has been limited evidence of a properly supported corporate and strategic commitment to engage with local people. The Council now needs to harness and support the work already underway by providing clear corporate direction and leadership.
- 2.9 To achieve this we believe that the Council must adopt a number of guiding principles which are:
- **Prioritise ongoing community engagement**
 - **Know the community**
 - **Communicate effectively**
 - **Respect and value the community**

PRIORITISING ONGOING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 2.10 Strengthening the community is currently one of the authority's corporate priorities. Prioritising ongoing community engagement will require, among other things, a commitment at political and senior management level, and the establishment of appropriate support structures to encourage improvement. A clear message is needed that effective community engagement is an integral part of the day job and not an 'add on'. It must be incorporated fully within the Council's service planning processes, at corporate, Directorate and service levels.
- 2.11 Appropriate community involvement should form an integral part of the overall service planning process. All service plans should be made accessible on the internet. Opportunities should be sought for genuine and appropriate involvement at the different stages of evaluating existing services and considering proposals for new initiatives.
- 2.12 Integrating community involvement into the mainstream activities of the Council, at Councillor as well as officer level, is also implicit to prioritising community

engagement. The government's vision for vibrant local leadership gives Ward Councillors a clear local community leadership role, which is more challenging than the traditional role of local representative / advocate and will be enabled through the area working introduced as part of New Harrow. As discussed in our social inclusion case study, it is important to enable Councillors to be effective in both these roles. The current support for Councillors to understand fully their roles and responsibilities, and to learn how to develop the necessary skills to fulfil these roles, needs to be strengthened.

- 2.13 As well as the above cultural changes, the Council will need to look both tactically and operationally at the structures which it has in place to support effective performance in this area. Engagement will only be valued if it is assessed. We believe that an evaluation of engagement processes as part of the Audit and Risk Management Service's annual programmed examination of Directorate functions would support improvement.
- 2.14 There is also a need to look at the developmental support which can be made available to provide officers and Councillors with the knowledge and skills to engage with the community. We recommend the production of an online toolkit which provides clear guidance on good engagement practices and are glad to know that this now forms part of the planned work associated with the development of the community engagement strategy. We see no reason why such a toolkit should not be made available on the internet for use by partner bodies and stakeholders if required.
- 2.15 The Council has only recently employed its first community engagement policy officer and we have already seen the difference that this has made. We believe, however, that the amount of work that is required is too great for a single officer and that further corporate support is needed. We see a small corporate unit as supporting Directorates with specialist skills and knowledge, and that such a unit could reduce the duplication of departmental effort that currently takes place. Such support should not detract in any way from the responsibilities of individual services to ensure that they have fully and appropriately taken into consideration all relevant factors when planning engagement activities; the ultimate responsibility must still rest with the service provider. If the Council is serious about community engagement, then the corporate unit could also act as an internal 'challenge' on whether the Council is pursuing all available opportunities to increase the influence of local people through outreach and genuine engagement.
- 2.16 There is an urgent need for far better co-ordination of the Council's engagement activities, both at individual project and strategic level. We are particularly disappointed that a corporate Community Engagement Strategy has not formed the basis of other engagement initiatives, such as the Youth Participation Strategy and the Statement of Community Involvement, rather than following the piecemeal approach which has been adopted. We believe that this is both ineffective and inefficient. In our opinion this is an example of the previously mentioned need for corporate leadership and direction in the field of community engagement. We are pleased that the Policy and Partnership Unit have found our own audit of Directorates' planned engagement activities of great use in developing the draft

Community Engagement Strategy and, as a result, work has already started on improving joined up working. We believe that there is much work to be done.

- 2.17 In addition to supporting officers and Councillors to engage with the community, there is a parallel need to support the community in getting involved. This includes capacity building, the provision of financial incentives so that participants are not 'out of pocket', the use of creative and appropriate methods of engagement to secure access for as many sectors of the community as possible and, importantly, communicating effectively. We recognise that there are significant resource implications (both financial and in officer and Councillor time) associated with this approach but are also aware that some of these issues are covered in the draft community engagement strategy or are expected to form part of the proposed toolkit.

KNOWING THE COMMUNITY

- 2.18 Harrow is a diverse Borough. It contains many different communities, which are not necessarily geographically bound. Furthermore, individuals may identify with a number of different communities. The community is a complex organism which we need to understand if we are to fairly balance competing views and demands. It is also constantly evolving. Knowing the community is central to effective engagement.
- 2.19 Not only do different communities have different needs and cultures, they also may need different approaches to getting them involved. It is, therefore, essential for target groups to be identified at the start of any engagement activity and appropriate means of making contact identified and planned from the outset. This may well mean that any engagement exercise involves a range of different activities, targeted at different communities. There will, of course, be both financial and staffing resource implications associated with the adoption of an approach based on a basket of measures but such commitments will, at times, be necessary to achieve inclusivity and equal access.
- 2.20 Work has already started at area level to identify, get to know and connect with local communities. This work is critical, and due to the changing nature of communities, must be kept updated. Equally important is the sharing of this knowledge, and future developments, across the Council and with partners. Appropriate processes must be put in place to support these objectives. We believe that the establishment of collaborative groups at the area level would contribute to the development of local area knowledge. For the reasons outlined above, we stress that the establishment of a geographical involvement process should supplement, rather than replace, other forms of engagement.

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

- 2.21 The public often feels there is little point in responding to the Council's consultative documents because decisions have already been taken and the exercise is simply designed to 'tick the box' to meet government-set targets.

- 2.22 The Council must make the purpose of any engagement exercise clear from the start and state honestly and clearly what is/is not possible and where the boundaries of influence lie. It also needs to make clear the decision making processes at each stage of an activity and give a realistic timescale for completion of the exercise, decision making, feedback of results, implementation of any agreed changes and the monitoring of outcomes. A lead officer/contact person should be identified. We believe this clear and honest communication of terms and boundaries will, over time, help to dispel the cynicism which currently exists.
- 2.23 The Council must ensure that all its communications are conveyed in an appropriate, accessible and acceptable manner. The written word is not the only means of communicating and, in some cases, creative and innovative methods are far more effective.
- 2.24 Both our case studies make a number of recommendations around communicating effectively. We would reiterate, in particular, the importance of using plain English, knowing the target stakeholder groups and their needs/preferences, using a range of media and basket of activities where appropriate, and finally making events as interesting (and enjoyable) as possible.
- 2.25 The Council already has a strategy for external communications. The evidence that we heard in our review has led us to the conclusion that the Council needs to develop a parallel strategy to support and strengthen internal communications. This will help in the essential task of sharing, publicising and promoting good practice internally.

RESPECTING AND VALUING THE COMMUNITY

- 2.26 The prevailing public view is that engagement is often undertaken to validate proposed actions or existing approaches, rather than offering real influence on the way the Council is run. The Council should critically consider the purpose, intended outputs and desired outcomes of engagement exercises before taking a final decision on their value. There will be times when engagement is inappropriate because there is no scope to exert any real influence.
- 2.27 The Open Budget Process has shown that the community is able to understand situations, evaluate needs, and prioritise demands provided that it is given the right information. The Council must learn to respect this ability and to value the input it receives. Providing and communicating the right information in appropriate ways enables the community to be fully involved. Opening up information channels and establishing transparent processes to support the democratic decision making process is, therefore, critical.
- 2.28 Respect for community input must also be demonstrated by providing all those involved (and interested) in issues with feedback on how their input has influenced decisions made. Providing feedback is essential if the community is to feel that its input has been taken into account and valued. It is also an area that needs significant improvement across the Council.

CONCLUSION

- 2.29 In conclusion, we believe that there is much that the Council can do to improve the way that it engages with the community. We believe, however, that the Council is well placed to address some of the many challenges that it faces, given the will to do so. Some of this work has already started although there is still a considerable way to go. The embedding of area working across the Council provides a good structure for identifying and developing the critical community contacts and gradually winning back the trust of the community. We believe that there is still sufficient goodwill out in the community to make this work as well as a wish to get more involved in a meaningful way. We have been impressed by the commitment of our staff to improve in their own service areas and are confident that, given the right leadership and support, improvements will result.
- 2.30 Leadership, both by Councillors and senior management, is critical to improvement. Ward Councillors have a clear role as neighbourhood champions, leaders and advocates for their wards and communities. Through community engagement, Councillors can contribute to the provision of effective public services for all local residents, including the socially excluded communities which are, at present, not accessing mainstream provision.
- 2.31 We recognise that some of our recommendations will be particularly challenging for the Council and that there will, inevitably, be significant resource implications in taking our proposals forward. We strongly believe that the Council must address the challenges we have identified. Community engagement is central to the government's vision for the future of local government, is critical in raising satisfaction levels, is essential to the success of the Business Transformation Partnership and is also an 'invest to save' project. But most importantly its effective delivery is essential to the provision of services which meet the needs of local communities and address issues of social cohesion in a way which is sustainable and makes a difference to the quality of life of local residents.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE MAIN REVIEW

(additional to any included within the case study reports)

PRIORITISING ONGOING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 1 Community engagement must be made an integral part of the Council's activities and not viewed as an 'add on' to Councillors' and officers' day jobs.**
- 2 Council should ensure that appropriate structures are put in place to support this new approach to working with the community. We would recommend that this includes the following:**
 - a) the full incorporation of community engagement within the service planning processes at corporate, Directorate and service levels and the publication of those plans on the internet;**
 - b) the development of an easy to use online toolkit to provide officers with good practice advice and guidance on effective community engagement is prioritised;**
 - c) the application of the Council's project planning process to all major engagement activities;**
 - d) as a priority, the introduction of processes to co-ordinate all of the Council's engagement activities;**
 - e) the upgrading of the Council's website incorporates an online diary of Council engagement events which is publicly available to view and comment on via the message board;**
 - f) the Council reviews the corporate resource available to support Directorates with the specialist knowledge and advice essential for effective community engagement;**
 - g) the Council reviews its processes for sharing information with staff at all levels and develops an internal engagement strategy;**
 - h) the Council develops processes to share, publicise and promote good engagement practices both internally and externally.**
- 3 We recommend that the Council adopts a clear strategic statement on the purpose of its engagement activities along the lines set out below, together with a supporting policy and clear criteria:**

- a) This Council will not support action which isolates any community from the wider Harrow Community, whether that isolation is initiated by that community or by others.
- b) This Council will support actions that enable all communities to play a full social and political part in the life of this Borough.
- c) This Council will support actions that foster mutual respect and understanding between our diverse communities through education and/or the celebration of diversity.
- d) This Council will, within agreed criteria and guidelines, support actions by communities that enable them to maintain their unique heritage within the law, and so long as such actions do not contravene the principles above.

KNOWING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- 4 The Council recognises the complex, diverse and developmental nature of local communities and adopts a basket of engagement approaches to ensure that all engagement activities are appropriate, acceptable and accessible to as wide a range of people as possible. It must recognise that some communities are not being engaged through the formal political process and make a special effort to engage with them, using the range of methods, formal and informal, at its disposal. It should, nevertheless accept that some parts of the community will, inevitably, be excluded from certain activities.
- 5 The Council prioritises its efforts to identify, link with and understand all its communities and establishes processes to share information gathered across the Council and with partner bodies.
- 6 The Council establishes a framework for collaborative area meetings, jointly chaired by Councillors and elected community representatives, on which Ward Councillors would serve. It should make available appropriate resources for any groundwork required to skill and empower the community to engage with the Council in this way, as well as for supporting the meetings once established.

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

- 7 The Council must determine and clearly set out the purpose of the message board and put into place appropriate structures to support its operation. This includes the provision of an appropriate budget to manage the message board and training for officers across all Directorates and the public on its purpose and use.
- 8 The launch of the message board facility should be supported by a high profile publicity campaign, which should incorporate training sessions on the use of the facility.

- 9 **Communication strategies must be tailored to the community we seek to communicate with such that they are likely to be successful in the context of that community.**
- 10 **Translation of documents, or the offer to translate documents, should only take place within a broader strategy that has identified translation as the most effective vehicle to communicate with a specified community, and should be balanced against the broader objective of facilitating such communities fully participating in the social and political life of the wider Harrow Community.**
- 11 **English language training should be strongly supported to facilitate access of minority groups to the wider Harrow Community. We see this as constituting Investing to Save.**
- 12 **A process is agreed and established around the production of all Council publications. This should include:**
 - a) **Registration of documents issued: A requirement that all services should notify the Communications Unit of all publications which are being produced in significant numbers (the threshold limit of which needs to be agreed), and sends them a copy of the document together with the numbers produced, whether Communications are involved in the production of the document or not.**
 - b) **Criteria for communications involvement: Criteria should be set for services to use in determining when the Communications Unit should be called to assist in the production of such publications.**

RESPECTING AND VALUING THE COMMUNITY

- 13 **The Council should consider establishing a shadowing scheme whereby Council officers could be placed in voluntary sector organisations to exchange experiences and share good practices and vice versa.**

ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

- 14 **Those Departments providing technical support to the public (such as the duty planning officer, crossover applications, Governor services) should consider similar innovation to service provision as adopted by Housing Benefits. Initially, such innovation might challenge traditional measures of community service levels. However, we believe new information channels and targeted services are more likely to come forward where officer time is 'freed up' in this way.**

3a) RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SOCIAL INCLUSION CASE STUDY

KNOWING THE COMMUNITY

- 1 As a priority, the Council must identify and develop its connections with, and knowledge of, its communities and put in place processes to share these connections and this knowledge across the Council and with partners.**

EARNING PUBLIC TRUST AND VALUING THE COMMUNITY

- 2 The Council should only decide to enter into an engagement activity after careful consideration of the purpose of the exercise, the intended outputs, the desired outcomes and the way in which they are to be measured and evaluated, from which a final decision on the real value of the proposal can be made. There are times when engagement could be inappropriate.**
- 3 When engagements are undertaken, the initial information must honestly and clearly set out the parameters of the exercise, the options available and their implications, and the decision making process and timetable.**
- 4 Feedback should be an integral part of engagement. Views offered in response must be listened and replied to. This could be in writing or by email to individual comments/queries or, where the numbers concerned are great, by publishing overall results on the Internet. A clear statement must be given to explain why particular ideas are not being accepted.**
- 5 Unless there are clear overriding reasons to the contrary, funding for community initiatives should follow public interest and support for projects.**

COMMUNICATIONS

- 6 All public documents should be written in plain English.**
- 7 Officers writing public documents should be trained in plain English writing skills.**
- 8 The Audit & Risk Management Service should include an examination of the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of engagement activities when examining any Directorate function as part of its annual work programme.**
- 9 A communications plan should form an integral part of the initial project plan of any engagement activity.**
- 10 Consideration should be given to ways to enable those with difficulties in communicating in written English to participate in engagement activities. Where applicable, advice should be sought from relevant voluntary bodies.**
- 11 Engagement documents should not be automatically translated into minority languages but, where appropriate, alternative ways should be**

sought to enable members from such communities to participate. This could, for example, involve interpreted meetings, engagement through local voluntary bodies, or indeed the use of bilingual community representatives as the project link.

- 12 The Council and its partner bodies should examine ways of increasing the support available to those who do not speak or read English to develop these skills.

YOUTH SERVICES

- 13 The Council should develop a new framework for the commissioning of youth programmes based upon the following principles:

- a. that services to mainstream youth are delivered by voluntary and community groups;
- b. that statutory services are delivered in tandem with voluntary and community groups;
- c. that professionals support voluntary and community groups by, for instance, assisting them to meet minimum child protection standards;
- d. that services are designed and delivered to address the needs of youth on the edge of statutory need: eg those that are at risk of presenting through the criminal justice system;
- e. that flexibility in the use of Borough assets encourages the Youth Service to refocus its resources away from Community Youth Centres, and toward joint working with schools, children centres, and existing community assets and groups.

- 14 The High Performing Harrow Project should be used to develop effective local Performance Indicators for the Youth Service.

- 15 The Council should extend the target age group for which it provides outreach / criminal justice related services.

RAYNERS LANE ESTATE AND TENANT PARTICIPATION

- 16 The Council should recognise that in transferring its housing properties to another social landlord, as has taken place on the Rayners Lane Estate, it still retains its other responsibilities to local residents. All services should, therefore, seek to work in partnership with any new landlord in identifying and addressing identified local needs.

- 17 High Performing Harrow should be used to develop, in conjunction with the Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations (HFTRA), local Performance Indicators to capture performance in relation to the functioning of Tenants' and Residents' Associations (TRA). To assist in this, the annual

estate questionnaire should include a question on how well the relevant estate TRA is felt to represent each tenant.

CULTURAL AND STRUCTURAL CHANGE

- 18 **Community engagement needs to be at the heart of the work the Council does and space and time must be found for it in the job descriptions and roles that officers play. This will allow the Council to join up its work and knowledge and achieve better efficiency and efficacy. It will also improve the perception of Harrow Council by the people it serves.**
- 19 **Harrow People should be used to improve the public's knowledge about the way the Council operates and that this is supported by increased and innovative outreach work.**
- 20 **The Council devises a programme of outreach activities for the next Local Democracy Week, focussed on helping the public to understand what the Council does and how it is run.**
- 21 **A simple booklet or leaflet explaining the Council's structure and how it works would be useful for the public, officers and councillors. A flow chart of how to get things done would be appropriate, together with a 'How-to guide' of how to engage with the Council. Both First Contact and the Communications Unit should be involved in the production of these documents.**
- 22 **An informal network should be created of staff with experience and knowledge of regeneration issues for use as an organisational 'hothouse' of expertise to support the regeneration unit as/when required. A system should be established to capture this information.**
- 23 **All Service plans should include a section on community engagement, showing what are the service's plans, timescales and resources for community engagement, together with an assessment of the expected service delivery outcomes and performance measures.**
- 24 **In the interests of transparency and to facilitate engagement, all Departmental service plans should be published on the Internet. The Internet and intranet should be delivered from a single common database. In the interests of transparency, all material on the intranet should be available on the Internet unless there is good reason to do otherwise.**

GRANT FUNDING

- 25 **A 'risk pot' of funding should be identified from the main Grants budget for use in supporting new and emerging community groups on the lines suggested in paragraph 11.2 of the social inclusion case study. This initiative should be incorporated into any future Local Area Agreement (LAA) submission to the Government Office for London (GOL). The funds for this pilot should be separately identified from the main Grants budget.**

- 26 Consideration should be given to establishing a pilot scheme to provide funding for 'Rewards for Achievement' for work being done by frontline, grassroots organisations, based on past (unfunded) performance. This pilot should also be funded from the main Grants budget.
- 27 The Grants Advisory Panel should also consider dividing its available funds into discretely identified blocks.

GOOD PRACTICE IN ENGAGEMENT

- 28 The proposed toolkit of good engagement practices should be made available on both the intranet and the Internet.

ROLE OF COUNCILLORS

- 29 A member development programme providing guidance on the role and responsibilities of Ward Councillors, particularly in the context of the Government's vibrant local leadership agenda, should be developed in time for the new Councillor intake after the 2006 elections

3b) RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TRAFFIC CASE STUDY

TRANSPARENT PROCESSES

- 1 To ensure total credibility and exposure, all consultation material:**
 - a) must include a positive statement as to the considerations and reasoning behind the “proposal”. It should also set out substantiated positives and negatives for any “proposal” and show that the local needs are understood;**
 - b) must be delivered to ALL households affected, including flats, where some people can be “left out”, and everyone on the electoral register urged to respond, thus minimising the risk of people being excluded from the process. The criteria adopted for determining which households are affected by a proposed scheme, either because of their geographical location or by being within the area of impact, should be published. We do not believe that the separate delivery of a consultation document to every individual on the electoral register would be an effective use of public monies;**
 - c) should state the purpose of the consultation, what outcomes could arise, and aspects of the “proposal” that can/cannot be influenced by responses to the consultation;**
 - d) should also clearly state whether the “proposal” is Mandated on the Council (and by whom), Advisory (and by whom) or of the Council’s own volition;**
 - e) should show local data that justifies the “proposal” in a straightforward manner.;**
 - f) should exclude significant reference to National data as this can make the “proposal” seem remote and dissuade response since it can cause the “proposal” to be viewed as likely to be implemented regardless of the responses to the consultation exercise;**
 - g) should give a balanced assessment of the ‘pros and cons’ of the proposals;**
 - h) should be open and effectively communicate the true options where the public can influence a “proposal”.**
- 2 To provide transparency:**
 - a) an analysis of the impact of traffic proposals should be made available from the outset. At the initial phase of any “proposal”, the project leader should document and make public the data that gave rise to the “proposal” and the justification for its promotion;**

- b) the public should be made aware of how the engagement exercise is to be undertaken, including the decisions to be made at each stage of the exercise, the process/criteria for selecting particular options and the sorts of considerations which might give rise to changes to the proposals;
- c) the public should be informed where proposals emanate from and who makes the final decision;
- d) schemes should be reviewed post implementation and the results made available to the public;
- e) the Council should (with the exception of safety schemes) aim to undertake reviews after no more than 12 months post “Implementation” of a scheme and consideration should be given to earmarking some resources to address any identified issues/problems. If resources do not exist to undertake the review until year 3 or 4, the project leader should at least document in a short report their commentary and any user feedback for future analysis. Due to their different nature, safety schemes should continue to be reviewed after three years unless there are exceptional circumstances.

LISTENING TO AND VALUING THE COMMUNITY

- 3 Staff should be trained to demonstrate the value placed on all public input, including the more difficult instances which may “only affect a few”, by responding in user friendly and constructive ways. Individuals often share their good, and bad, experiences amongst their own wide circle of contacts.
- 4 The public must be kept informed of the outcome of engagement/consultation exercises by:
 - a) placing in the public domain findings resulting from “information” gathering and consultations and the progress of scheme development;
 - b) making use of all physical and technological means to reach as many sectors of the public as possible, including community notice boards, local libraries and other information points, and any neighbourhood communications arena opportunities offered by the area structure;
 - c) providing all who respond to a consultation with updates and feedback at appropriate times. For major exercises, where levels of response are expected to be high, the Council’s website should be used. In this case, it is essential to inform respondees of the timescale for posting the feedback/updates and, mindful of the digital

divide, to invite individuals without IT skills/facilities to request the posted information in alternative formats;

- d) indicating how a decision was made when no clear mandate was received or the decision made was contrary to the mandate.

COMMUNICATIONS

5 A two stage information and consultation process should be adopted which:

- a) involves people early and not just the large groups;
- b) uses existing and new publicity approaches e.g. Harrow People, New Harrow Project Area Services and the Council's website, to advise the community of emerging issues that either the Council or the Council together with the Community consider could do with some attention;
- c) ensures full consultation which then references the initial publicity, reports on how the "proposal" was developed and what the key issues were from which the plans now published were formulated.

6 The actual and apparent image of Community contact should be improved by:

- a) creating regular consultative forums;
- b) establishing First Contact knowledgeable enquiry and information points. The development of responses, based on individual services' input, to some Frequently Asked Question would assist staff to respond to all forms of incoming enquiry and referrals;
- c) providing documentation that has the right balance between detail and being too shallow/full;
- d) considering the use of more graphical and pictorial representation in consultation material and the provision of minicom service, both of which should increase the number of people who can access and respond to the presented information;
- e) implementing the message board facility on a permanent basis;
- f) centralising the production, and even processing, of consultation material and associated publicity using information and detail from the service area. Directorates **MUST** give final clearance to all documents to ensure the right message is being conveyed. If central resourcing is not practical, Directorates should consider securing the services of a dedicated communications officer;

- g) avoiding all documents having an almost identical look and presentation, which could lead to public confusion.**

JOINED UP WORKING

7 To avoid apparent silo working and encourage a joined up approach, we recommend:

- a) establishing a publicly available combined schedule of consultations and plans from all Directorates;**
- b) ensuring that issues and “proposals” raised within one Directorate or consultation that reference or impact another are adequately reviewed so that the outcome enables all the benefits achievable from the linkage to be derived for the good of the community. This may mean some schemes are delayed slightly while the other issues or funds etc are channelled to maximise those benefits and long term savings created by dealing with them in isolation or at different times,**
- c) watching and catering for issues that arise as consequential impact and avoiding ripple effects on neighbouring areas or groups of people;**
- d) ensuring that any consultancy appointed to carry out consultation on behalf of the Council is made aware of all the history that led to the “proposal” AND any plans from other Directorates that could have or be perceived to have an impact on the “proposal” under review. Consultants’ work must be checked for accuracy by the commissioning service and possibly also by area management;**
- e) making use of the various feedback mechanisms emerging with the roll out of both the Area Managers and Area Champions.**

8 To support more effective use of Transport for London (TfL) funding arrangements, we recommend that:

- a) Cabinet raises with TfL the challenges of the current funding arrangements and seeks the full removal of the year end barrier on spend, which causes unnecessary pressure on timescales, often limiting consultation times and inducing non priority year end spend;**
- b) processes are established to strengthen good housekeeping and progress reporting to minimise the impact of the current annual funding arrangement and have alternative schemes for use ready in the pipeline should the barrier not be moved in the short term.**

4 INTRODUCTION

- 4.1 This review has been undertaken because of the importance which we attach to the way that the Council engages with local people. Other recent reviews, and our experiences as Ward Councillors, have highlighted the need to look at this issue in greater depth. In particular, the successful and constructive work of the Community Budget Group, which was established under the recent scrutiny review of Budget Processes, demonstrated to us the very real value, both to the Council and the community, of true community engagement. This work has now been taken a stage further by the Council in the pioneering Open Budget Process, established under the stewardship of the Power Inquiry to obtain community input into the setting of the Council's budget priorities for 2006/07. The latter has been specifically excluded from the scope of this review since it is still too early to evaluate its operation and outcomes. Although this responsibility rests with the Power Inquiry, scrutiny will continue to observe the process with interest.
- 4.2 Central government is placing increasing emphasis on the importance of community engagement, both for itself and for Local Authorities and for other statutory bodies. As far back as 1998, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), for example, published guidance on enhancing public participation in local government. The government's recently published vision for the future of local government, which is based around the creation of sustainable communities, continues this message by identifying the theme of local neighbourhood arrangements as one of the four ways in which the vision is to be achieved. Putting into place engagement opportunities for neighbourhood communities is one of the five identified guiding principles for developing effective neighbourhood arrangements.
- 4.3 Central government's vision for the future of local government clearly places neighbourhood arrangements and citizen engagement at the heart of its five year strategic plan. It highlights experiences across the country which have shown that the best way to get services delivered effectively is for local people to take an active role in solving problems. Local authorities and service providers are being encouraged to give local people more influence over what is delivered and how and to provide local people with the opportunities, support and tools to get together to drive improvements.
- 4.4 The government has promoted neighbourhood renewal through initiatives such as the neighbourhood renewal pathfinder programmes. Although Harrow has not had the benefit of neighbourhood renewal funding, the government's clear view is that lessons learnt from new approaches to renewing neighbourhoods should be incorporated into mainstream funding programmes. It wants to see local authorities and other key service providers actively seek to direct their services to meet the needs of the most deprived neighbourhoods.
- 4.5 The effectiveness with which Councils engage with their service users and wider communities is also being given increased emphasis in the new Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) regime, when the Audit Commission will be looking for evidence that engagement activities have made a real difference in

practice; the quality and robustness of the Council's own customer surveys, citizens' panels and other consultation methods will be used to inform decisions. User focus and diversity will form a core element of the assessment with judgements threaded throughout the key lines of enquiry from ambition through to achievement. Under the new arrangements, 'the corporate assessment Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) for CPA 2005 measure how well local councils understand their local communities'. There are more than 100 references to different aspects of community engagement contained in the new document.

- 4.6 Along with most other Authorities, the Council experiences difficulties in engaging effectively with the public as a whole, with little interest normally being generated by its initiatives. Members of the public, and staff, have told us that past experiences have led to feelings that the Council does not really listen to what the community says, fails to value the views which are articulated and lacks transparency in its decision making processes.
- 4.7 Our work has shown that, overall, the Council does not have a good track record of engaging with the community. Most engagement activities are either 'informing' or 'consulting' them on proposals or collaborating, often with established local contacts. In far few cases is there any direct and ongoing 'involvement' of the public throughout a process to ensure that the communities' aspirations and concerns are understood and considered. Even more rarely does the Council embark upon any 'empowerment' exercises (those involving the public as partners in each aspect of the decision making process or placing the final decision-making in the hands of the public).
- 4.8 The role of Councillors is discussed in the report on the case study on social inclusion, the conclusions and recommendations from which we fully endorse.
- 4.9 We are optimistic on the potential for positive change. New Harrow has brought major changes to the way that the Council is run and its services are delivered. Some of the results of these changes, such as the introduction of area based public realm maintenance services and the establishment of community/extended schools, are very evident to the community. Others are still being developed, such as the recently established Business Transformation Partnership, and are expected to have a further significant impact on the way that the Council works with local people. We believe that it provides the Council with a solid structure on which to improve the way it engages with local people.
- 4.10 We have been enormously encouraged by the very positive reception of our conclusions and recommendations both from officers and the Executive. Through our close working with the Policy and Partnership Unit, many of our recommendations are already being adopted as part of the plans to implement the Community Engagement Strategy. The Corporate Management Team has confirmed that our work will be of enormous help. We will be accepting the Chief Executive's invitation to us to work alongside Directorates in their embedding of community engagement activities within their service plans.
- 4.11 We were also delighted at the equally positive response that we received from members of the Executive one of whom commented that we had undertaken an

excellent review, which was probably the most significant piece of work scrutiny has undertaken to date. We believe that our findings and recommendations should help encourage significant changes to the working of the Council and, most importantly, to the local community. As in all scrutiny work, we have approached this review in the spirit of true collaboration across all the political groups and trust that all groups will pledge their commitment to improving the Council's community engagement processes both now and in the new administration, irrespective of political complexion.

5 METHODOLOGY

- 5.1 The scope for the review is at Appendix 1. Our work has included examination of two case studies, focussed on very different issues to provide us with a wider picture of how the Council as a whole engages with the community.
- 5.2 Our traffic case study looked at the way that the Council involves local people on traffic proposals/developments in their area. From our own experiences and an analysis of the issues referred to the Call-In Sub-Committee, we knew that traffic issues were amongst those which generated the strongest feelings within local communities, with many initiatives being led by public demand. The referrals to Call-In Sub-Committee suggested that there was some community concern about the consultative processes which were being followed. Although the issue of traffic consultations had been reviewed by the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Sub-Committee in 2003, we felt that a case study in this area would help identify good practices which could be rolled out across the Council as a whole.
- 5.3 Our second case study, on social inclusion/regeneration issues, was selected in the light of the Council's decision to undertake a social inclusion pilot scheme. We revisited our decision to look at the work undertaken in Wealdstone Town Centre and on the Rayners Lane Estate when the decision was made to base the pilot scheme in Wealdstone, since we felt that concurrent scrutiny activity in the area could duplicate, or possibly even detract, from some of the engagement work being undertaken as part of the pilot. Our initial evidence gathering in both of these areas, however, highlighted the fact that some young people in both areas belonged to socially excluded communities and that many of the young people currently at risk are drawn from such communities. We, therefore, determined that our primary focus in this case study would be young, socially excluded groups.
- 5.4 Our work has involved gathering evidence from a wide range of sources, including the following:
- Evidence from expert witnesses – Richard Wilson, Director of INVOLVE, who spoke to us on good engagement practices generally; Patrick Lewis, Head of Harlesden & Stonebridge Neighbourhood Renewal Team, Brent Council who shared his professional and voluntary experiences of working with unengaged young people; John Matlin who informed us of the findings of his research into the Citizen's League in Minnesota USA; and (Councillor) Adam Lent, who brought to us some of his professional knowledge and experiences of community engagement.
 - Evidence sessions with officers from the Council and partner bodies – in particular from housing officers and Warden Housing Association on the community development and regeneration work undertaken and currently underway on the Rayners Lane Estate and the support provided to Council tenant and resident associations, the regeneration officer, the ICT transformation manager, on engagement with local people in Wealdstone, particularly through the Wealdstone Active Community.

- Evidence sessions with the Chief Executive, the Director of Children's Services and the then Area Directors; meeting with the Corporate Management Team
- Meetings with the Leader and the Deputy Leader; the Portfolio Holders for Communications, Partnership, and Human Resources; for Education and Lifelong Learning; for Environment and Transport; for Planning, Development and Housing; and for Social Care and Health, and with the Chair of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee
- Focus groups with middle managers and frontline staff on how the Council can improve its engagement processes
- Focus group with community representatives and a workshop with the Community Consultative Forum on how the Council can improve its engagement processes; activities at the Rayners Lane Fun Day
- Responses to our poster campaign, article in Harrow People and experimental message board
- Our audit of Directorates' planned community engagement activities
- Consideration of the draft Community Engagement Strategy
- Meeting with Youth Akili and Media 4 Life, grassroots youth organisations
- Surveys of respondents to traffic consultations on three implemented schemes and discussions with the Council's Transportation Manager
- Visit to Ealing Council and attendance at the Croydon Council Beacon Open Day
- MORI residents' satisfaction survey
- Desktop research into good practices
- Experiences from past scrutiny reviews and personal experiences as Ward Councillors/ community representatives

5.5 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee tries to secure appropriate community input in all its reviews and was particularly keen to ensure that the community view was properly represented in the Hear/Say work. We have, therefore, been especially fortunate to have a community representative and a Councillor jointly leading the main review and each case study. This is the first time that a community representative has been involved in leading a review and this in itself has been a groundbreaking experience in community engagement for scrutiny. Both the Council and the voluntary sector have learnt a lot from this joint working.

5.6 In undertaking our review, we have worked closely with the officers working on the Council's Community Engagement Strategy. We are glad that our findings have

informed the development of the strategy and that the important role that scrutiny can play in supporting the development of key policies has been recognised and valued.

6 FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 PRIORITISING ONGOING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Key Findings

- 6.1.1 Many local authorities now have a strong and clear commitment to community engagement. This Council is currently developing its Community Engagement Strategy.
- 6.1.2 Through our staff focus groups and meetings with individual officers, we found a tremendous level of commitment at an individual level to engaging with the community in meaningful and effective ways. Many members of staff, however, were not plugged into the bigger picture and felt that there was a lack of corporate direction. Some people, for example, were unaware that a Council-wide Community Engagement Strategy was being developed, despite discussions at Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Director levels.
- 6.1.3 Staff also pointed out to us that there was no overview in providing a consistent approach to good practice or targets against which performance could be measured. So, whilst there was the will to engage with local people in meaningful terms, there is little help or guidance for individuals on the best way forward.
- 6.1.4 Engagement activities are generally undertaken as an element of a wider activity and are sometimes poorly planned. They are not truly embedded within the service planning process.
- 6.1.5 Our audit of Directorates planned engagement activities highlighted the need for Directorates to view community engagement holistically. It also demonstrated to us that engagement activities were sometimes poorly planned, with cursory attention being given to the financial and staff resources which would be needed to complete the exercise. This was the first time that such an exercise had been undertaken. Our findings confirmed the view that community engagement is seen as an 'add on' to staff's day jobs.
- 6.1.6 As mentioned above, staff in different Directorates (and indeed sometimes within the same Directorate) can work in isolation, unaware of similar or complementary work being undertaken elsewhere. This has resulted in instances of unnecessary duplication of work and the risk of generating consultation fatigue within the community. Furthermore, this lack of coordination is likely to lead to a loss of confidence in the Council's ability to manage its own affairs as well as providing poor Value For Money (VFM). Some other local authorities, such as the London Borough of Croydon, have developed an internet based diary of community engagement events.
- 6.1.7 Services currently developed and maintained their own contact networks and databases and there was no process for sharing this information.

- 6.1.8 Effective community engagement is not an easy task and, as advised by the Chief Executive, does not form part of the basic training of professionals. This can result in officers facing a complex task without the background, skills or confidence to take it forward effectively. Similarly, community engagement is neither part nor parcel of the development opportunities normally offered to Councillors or indeed members of the community. Work undertaken on the Rayners Lane Estate in the lead up to the transfer of the properties to Warden Housing Association did, however, recognise the importance of skilling up tenants and leaseholders to play a full and equal part in the transfer process. We believe that this was critical to the successful empowerment of that community. Some Authorities have established teams dedicated to working directly with local communities and, as part of their roles, support local people in developing their skills and confidence to engage with the Council.
- 6.1.9 Although the Council has not developed a neighbourhood renewal strategy, the Harrow Vitality Profile provides a good picture of the Borough and its needs.
- 6.1.10 Area working has been successfully rolled out across the Borough through Public Realm Maintenance Services and a number of community/extended schools have now become well established.
- 6.1.11 Harrow has a very good record in its relations between its richly diverse communities. This stands in stark contrast to many other areas of this country, the rest of Europe, and indeed many parts of the globe. This Council has demonstrated for many years, and under all administrations a commitment to defending this record and has received the support of the vast majority of residents in this.
- 6.1.12 We have not identified any statement by the Council that captured the essence of the balance that must be struck between integrationist and separatist philosophies when dealing with such diversity and received evidence that this balance was not always understood by our communities. We recommend that the Council adopts a statement to address this issue.

Conclusions

- 6.1.13 As a result of area working, introduced as part of New Harrow and now embedded within the organisational structure, the Council is already well placed to embrace the government's vision if it has the will to do so. To achieve good engagement, however, appropriate corporate structures must be put in place to enable Councillors, officers and the community to link together effectively.
- 6.1.14 Community engagement must become an integral part of the culture of the organisation if we are to secure real change. Until both Members and officers recognise community engagement as being part of their mainstream responsibilities, rather than an 'add on to their day jobs', progress will be limited and change slow. Whilst we see this need for cultural change as being key to improving current performance, it will need to be supported corporately by the introduction of tactical and operational measures. We recognise that there will be resource implications associated with this.

- 6.1.15 Our case studies, although looking at two very different areas, have both identified some common issues around the importance of transparency, listening, valuing and respecting the community and communicating effectively. We believe that these factors, combined with the need for cultural change, should be central to the Council's improvement plan and fully endorse these, and all the other recommendations, of our case study groups.
- 6.1.16 Key information is not reaching staff at all levels, with many staff being unaware not only of how and what other services are doing but also of major strategic developments. Keeping all staff, particularly those serving on the frontline, informed is critical given that effective engagement is often developed through personal interaction. Furthermore, an individual's experience of engagement has the potential for a far greater effect beyond the immediate issue since people tend to share their experiences of dealing with the Council, whether good or bad, amongst their network of contacts.
- 6.1.17 Currently, many engagement activities are undertaken with considerable goodwill but limited expertise or guidance. An easily accessible toolkit which provides staff with consistent good practice guidance would go some way to providing both a resource and a learning tool. We are pleased to see that the development of such a toolkit is proposed within the draft Community Engagement Strategy and recommend that the very practical recommendations and suggestions put forward in both our case study reports are taken on board in this exercise.
- 6.1.18 The development of targets against which performance can be measured and the introduction of an internal process to evaluate the effectiveness of engagement activities would also support learning and developments in this area. We endorse the recommendation included in the social inclusion case study that the responsibility for this evaluation would sit well within Audit and Risk Management Service and note that the Chief Executive shares this view.
- 6.1.19 It is generally felt that many local authority consultation activities are undertaken as one element of the development of a new policy or strategy and often factored in at a later stage of the proceedings with unrealistic timescales for response. There is then little wonder that the public believe that the 'consultation' is only being undertaken to 'tick the box' and with no real intention of taking into account the opinions expressed. We cannot over-emphasise the importance of careful planning of all engagement activities from the outset; a realistic assessment is needed of both the financial and staff resources which will be involved and the time needed, both by the Council and the community. We believe that the way to ensure that all these objectives are met is through a robust project planning process for all major engagement activities.
- 6.1.20 Our audit of planned community engagement activities highlighted the need for Directorates to view community engagement holistically. It also demonstrated to us that engagement activities were sometimes poorly planned, with cursory attention being given to the financial and staff resources which would be needed to complete the exercise. One manager reported back that her Directorate had found the audit highly valuable and had decided to adopt it, in an expanded form,

on a permanent basis. The work has also been used as base information for the development of the Community Engagement Strategy.

- 6.1.21 The Council still has a long way to go in co-ordinating its engagement activities. Although a considerable amount of work is going on in Directorates, we have found that activities are often undertaken on an ad-hoc basis and in isolation from other work which may impact, both within and across Directorates. There is a need for a system which allows the public internet access to an online diary of events. We would like to see this being developed as part of the upgrading of the Council's website and consideration being given, in due course, to sharing this facility with partner bodies.
- 6.1.22 The Council has only recently employed its first dedicated community engagement policy officer, whose arrival has already proved a valuable asset both in progressing the strategy and in supporting the activities of individual services. We have considered the case for retaining corporate support at this level and the arguments that this would ensure that services themselves recognise their own responsibilities for engaging with their stakeholders. However, we believe that the level of engagement activities planned by Directorates and the importance of getting effective corporate structures in place requires additional corporate resource. We see this as the most effective way to ensure that the Council has access to quality good practice knowledge and skills in what is a complex and vital area. We do not believe that this will be perceived as weakening the responsibilities of individual services.
- 6.1.23 The Business Transformation Partnership (BTP) has tremendous potential to improve the way that the Council engages with local communities, particularly through improving both internal and external communication networks and maximising the use of new technologies. Individual customer access to services will of course also be revolutionised through First Contact. Whilst it is too early to see any outcomes from the BTP, we shall monitor plans as they unfold.
- 6.1.24 The organisation needs to find ways to make time to provide officers opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to engage effectively with local communities. Conversely, support also needs to be given to the voluntary sector to enable residents to gain skills that will help them participate effectively and empower the community. The latter is due to be addressed as part of the Community Engagement Strategy Action Plan.
- 6.1.25 Notwithstanding the proposals within the draft Community Engagement Strategy, we believe that there is a need to adopt a further clear strategic statement on the purpose of the Council's engagement activities that seeks to identify the essence of Harrow's traditional approach to balancing integrationist and separatist philosophies when dealing with diversity, rather than one which recommends anything new in this area.
- 6.1.26 Our recommendation below is deliberately not specific as to the nature of the communities to which it refers. Rather, it covers diversity in all its forms, whether based on ethnicity, gender, age, disability, religious affiliation or any other distinguishing feature of our diverse Harrow Community. It is also equally

applicable to the majority as it is to minorities. This recommendation is not intended to be a platitude. There is a constant danger that in search of 'political correctness', or simple political expediency, this balance might be threatened. This recommendation is a codification of an existing part of Harrow's corporate culture. Such a codification is necessary because times change - and yet we desire some of our values not to change.

6.1.27 The role of Councillors is discussed in the report on the case study on social inclusion, the conclusions and recommendations from which we fully endorse.

Recommendations relating to Prioritising Ongoing Community Engagement
(additional to any included within our case study reports)

- 1 Community engagement must be made an integral part of the Council's activities and not viewed as an 'add on' to Councillors' and officers' day jobs.**
- 2 Council should ensure that appropriate structures are put in place to support this new approach to working with the community. We would recommend that this includes the following:**
 - a) the full incorporation of community engagement within the service planning processes at corporate, Directorate and service levels and the publication of those plans on the internet;**
 - b) the development of an easy to use online toolkit to provide officers with good practice advice and guidance on effective community engagement is prioritised;**
 - c) the Council's project planning process is applied to all major engagement activities;**
 - d) as a priority processes are introduced to co-ordinate all of the Council's engagement activities;**
 - e) the upgrading of the Council's website incorporates an online diary of Council engagement events which is publicly available to view and comment on via the message board;**
 - f) the Council reviews the corporate resource available to support Directorates with the specialist knowledge and advice essential for effective community engagement;**
 - g) the Council reviews its processes for sharing information with staff at all levels and develops an internal engagement strategy;**
 - h) the Council develops processes to share, publicise and promote good engagement practices both internally and externally.**

- 3 We recommend that the Council adopts a clear strategic statement on the purpose of its engagement activities along the lines set out below, together with a supporting policy and clear criteria:**
- a) This Council will not support action which isolates any community from the wider Harrow Community, whether that isolation is initiated by that community or by others.**
 - b) This Council will support actions that enable all communities to play a full social and political part in the life of this Borough.**
 - c) This Council will support actions that foster mutual respect and understanding between our diverse communities through education and/or the celebration of diversity.**
 - d) This Council will, within agreed criteria and guidelines, support actions by communities that enable them to maintain their unique heritage within the law, and so long as such actions do not contravene the principles above.**

6.2 KNOWING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Findings

- 6.2.1 Our social inclusion case study discusses the importance of building up a good knowledge base about our communities and makes a fundamental recommendation in this area. We know that organisations and communities are organic bodies that are constantly evolving. We also recognise that communities are not always geographically based and that individuals may identify with more than one community.
- 6.2.2 Voluntary and community groups are organic and constantly changing. There is no single knowledge point which maps out the information known about all our local organisations and communities. Services currently use their own data, some of which is without doubt considerably out of date.
- 6.2.3 Some work is underway at area level on identifying, contacting and mapping local organisations. The Harrow Association of Voluntary Service (HAVS) is currently compiling a directory of local organisations.
- 6.2.4 There are also vibrant organisations operating within the Borough who remain unknown, either by choice or by omission, to the Council and its partners. These 'feral' groups have their own networks of contacts. We met with one such group, Youth Akili, which is a self-supporting grassroots group of young people who engage with their younger members through a system of mentoring and the organisation of a programme of activities. The older mentors whom we met had, previously, not had any contact with Councillors and told us that they had not

imagined that Councillors would really listen to them. They were surprised to learn that Members shared similar experiences with themselves and said that they had been empowered by the meeting to continue what is undoubtedly highly valuable work.

- 6.2.5 There can be issues around whether all community representatives genuinely speak for their communities. Similarly, some minority groups have argued that Councillors are not able to represent their communities, compounding further their feelings of exclusion from the Council's decision making processes. Furthermore, input from the 'usual suspects' tends to loom large in many engagement activities, with restricted participation from the 'hard to reach' parts of the community.
- 6.2.6 Residents and local communities commend the benefits of area working. We heard a view that this could be strengthened by devolving further decision making powers to frontline area staff.
- 6.2.7 Many authorities, including Ealing and Croydon Councils, are now operating successful meetings at area level. There is a range of potential structures for these bodies, encompassing both consultative fora and bodies with delegated budgets and decision-making powers. The government's vision for neighbourhood arrangements encourages the move to true neighbourhood empowerment.

Conclusions

- 6.2.8 It is essential for the Council to get to know its community. In addition to identifying distinct communities, it needs to find out if and how identities overlap, so that there is awareness, at an early stage, of which communities are excluded/unlikely to be covered by any involvement approach/method. Alternative strategies can then be put in place where appropriate. Communities are complex, diverse and organic and this work, which we see being undertaken largely at area level, will need constant updating. Processes also need to be established to share the information gathered across the Council and with partner bodies.
- 6.2.9 The Council will need to recognise that there will almost always be people excluded from any engagement activity. The challenge is to identify accurately its key target stakeholders and to ensure that they have appropriate access to the engagement exercise.
- 6.2.10 The issue of 'representativeness' is a further difficult challenge for the Council. We recognise that there may be times when it is difficult to determine the extent to which individuals have a mandate to represent their whole community, particularly when the community involved is relatively loosely structured and otherwise not well linked to the Council. This tends to arise more in relation to minority communities. It is, therefore, essential for the Council to think carefully at the outset about what motivates people to take part and to use innovative and creative methods to involve as wide a range of people as possible. This often entails going out to the communities themselves, including door knocking, rather than waiting for responses to be sent to Council offices.

6.2.11 Some minority communities feel ignored and marginalised. They want to feel that their needs and concerns are being not only voiced but taken seriously and seen to be as important as those of stakeholders in the wider community. It is fair to say that this feeling also exists in the host community although probably at a less intense level. Some minority communities also feel that they are under-represented in the formal political processes. We believe in the principle of Councillors representing all their communities, irrespective of their personal background, and fear any other approach could bring ethnicity into politics and an ethnically divided community. We believe that, like MPs, Councillors should only take casework from their ward residents, rather than representing communities outside of their wards. We recognise, however, that some, particularly the newer minority communities, are not well linked into political processes. We suggest that political parties and minority groups need to work together to address the issue of appropriate political representation.

6.2.12 Some sectors of the community are more willing to engage with the Council and there are a number of 'usual suspects' and niche interest groups who are highly involved in working with the authority. It should also be recognised that the traditional perception of which groups are 'hard to reach' is likely to need re-definition; young professionals, for example, now fall within this category. We endorse the view of Richard Wilson, Director of Involve, that it is important to seek access for all but to recognise that all contributions will not necessarily be equal and to establish a process to distinguish between contributions. It is important to be clear from the outset which sectors of the community form the target group of stakeholders and to weight all contributions in this light.

6.2.13 The adoption of New Ways of Working (NWW), both by officers and Councillors, need to form part of the cultural change programme which is required if Harrow is to meet the government's visions for Vibrant Local Leadership and for Citizen Engagement and Public Services and provide services which meet the needs of local people. Our findings, particularly our experiences of working with Youth Akili, have reinforced our view that the Council must change the way it works if it is to extend its engagement to those parts of the community which have, up to now, not had any dealings with the Authority. We were very struck by the 'feral' (that is, informal and ad-hoc) networks which have enabled Youth Akili to develop

and operate. Individuals with common interests have connected with others, working in different areas and with different skills but with the same overall vision and ambition, to form a strong, committed and effective organisation focussed on the well-being of young people at risk.

6.2.14 Members of the review group, in their local leadership roles, have been able to follow up this contact by connecting a Media 4 Life (a company formed by a Youth Akili member) scrutiny pilot to Warden Housing Association and to the Children First extended schools project in Hatch End High School, both of whom it was felt may be able to use the skills and expertise of these young people. We believe that this is one example of how Councillors can play a real role at the heart of neighbourhood activity, to the benefit of our communities, and will monitor any developments in these areas.

- 6.2.15 We are aware that there are likely to be many other grassroots organisations working in similar ways in the community and firmly believe that the Council must identify and link up with such groups and their feral networks. We see the Area Managers and Champions, and their staff, and the extended schools as being critical in this work and note that some good work in identifying and establishing local contacts is already underway at area level.
- 6.2.16 Members of the public have told us of the positive benefits from area working, which already provides an effective structure for making these links at officer level. There is much work underway, some of which we have seen giving rise to synergies from officers and Members working together at the local level. The challenge for the Council is now to take this approach to the next level by formalising an area role for Ward Councillors. We believe that this should be progressed by establishing area meetings which, at least initially, should be consultative bodies without any decision making powers or delegated budgets. Our experiences on this review have convinced us of the effectiveness of meetings being jointly chaired by the Council and the community and would recommend that consideration should be given to adopting this model. It is essential that thorough groundwork with the community, including any necessary capacity building, is undertaken before setting up any area partnership meetings. We see this falling within the remit of the Area Champions/Managers.
- 6.2.17 These area partnership meetings should supplement, and not replace other forms of engagement. The community structure of the Borough is complex and has a wide range of other connectors, such as age, ethnicity, religion, special needs, and issue bases. It is, therefore, important that the Council employs methods of engagement which are appropriate, acceptable and accessible to the target groups identified for the exercise and seeks also to involve as wide a range of other stakeholders as possible. Where necessary, it should adopt a basket of engagement methods, of which the area partnership meetings would be one.

Recommendations relating to Knowing Local Communities

(additional to any included within our case study reports)

- 4 The Council recognises the complex, diverse and developmental nature of local communities and adopts a basket of engagement approaches to ensure that all engagement activities are appropriate, acceptable and accessible to as wide a range of people as possible. It must recognise that some communities are not being engaged through the formal political process and make a special effort to engage with them, using the range of methods, formal and informal, at its disposal. It should, nevertheless accept that some parts of the community will, inevitably, be excluded from certain activities.**
- 5 The Council prioritises its efforts to identify, link with and understand all its communities and establishes processes to share information gathered across the Council and with partner bodies.**

- 6 **The Council establishes a framework for collaborative area meetings, jointly chaired by Councillors and elected community representatives, on which Ward Councillors would serve. It should make available appropriate resources for any groundwork required to skill and empower the community to engage with the Council in this way, as well as for supporting the meetings once established.**

6.3 COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Findings

- 6.3.1 Both our case studies have identified the need to improve how the Council communicates with local people.
- 6.3.2 Use of the Council's residents' panel has fallen into decline in recent years but is due to be rejuvenated.
- 6.3.3 Through our focus groups, the Community Consultative Forum, our surveys and input other from individuals, the community has told us that the Council needs to be more transparent in the way that it engages with the public. In particular they want clear statements on decision making processes, clarity and honesty about what is/is not possible and timescales to achieve change/action, reasonable funding deadlines, and decisions, including those of formal Committees, to be recorded in a clear, transparent and honest way. We were also told that the Council only communicates when it is in its own interests to do so and is much less proactive in communicating matters which benefit individuals, rather than the organisation.
- 6.3.4 We do not always give feedback on the results of any engagement/consultation exercises, with members of the public often not hearing anything else for several months after responding.
- 6.3.5 We have also been told by the public that they would like Committee activities to be more accessible and the recording of Committee decisions to be improved. In addition, the need to record answers to all public questions and to revisit the Committee structure with a view to providing communities and umbrella organisations the opportunity for greater involvement was drawn to our attention, the existing processes being considered too limiting. We will refer the issue of seeking greater transparency in our decision-making processes to the Constitutional Working Party.
- 6.3.6 Communication is a two way process. The public view is that the Council does not listen to what is being said.
- 6.3.7 Our staff focus groups highlighted the diverse nature of our local communities and the importance of finding ways of involving everyone, rather than just the 'usual suspects' of people who already had good contact with the Council. Services currently developed and maintained their own contact networks and there is no process for sharing this information. As already discussed, we believe that there

are a number of 'feral' groups in the community with whom the Council has no links at all.

- 6.3.8 Harrow comprises many diverse communities, all of whose needs are unlikely to be met through a single engagement/consultation document or activity. Currently, much of the Council's community engagement is undertaken through a one-off exercise, such as a survey, a focus group or a public meeting.
- 6.3.9 Staff and community members have also stressed the need for any consultation documentation to be both accessible, effective and appropriate. Some documents are not written in plain English.
- 6.3.10 We have seen instances of published documents which would have benefited from the input of a communications specialist. There appears to be a lack of consistency about when individual services seek the support of the Communications Unit in producing their publications.
- 6.3.11 Furthermore, major consultation documents are frequently weighty tomes which are of little interest to the ordinary member of the public. They are rarely accessed since they are virtually meaningless to all but the most dedicated. Many people would prefer to see a simple document which outlines the key implications of proposals for the individual.
- 6.3.12 Only a few members of the public posted messages on the experimental Hear/Say message board during its four week life. However, over the same period, a number of individuals made contact to put forward their views, many of which were, in fact, related to service issues, rather than the three identified discussion threads. Furthermore, there was a six-fold increase in the number of emails and other correspondence sent to the scrutiny unit over a two-month period.

Conclusions

- 6.3.13 The Council must start to communicate with the public honestly, clearly and appropriately.
- 6.3.14 Documents should be written in plain English and alternative means should be provided for engaging with target groups who may not be able to access English language documents. This does not necessarily mean translating documents into minority languages. Translation is expensive, not everyone is literate in their own language and translation was found to be of very limited value. It must also be noted that some people prefer to engage through community channels. Translation can also further the isolation of minority groups from the wider Harrow Community, an unintended but serious consequence for civic engagement. In such cases alternative and appropriate means should be found to allow members from these communities to participate. This includes the provision of English language training to facilitate access of minority groups to the wider Harrow community. We see this as being investing to save. Similar measures will need to be considered for other groups, such as those with learning difficulties, who may not be able to access the written word. The use of imaginative and creative

approaches and all available media, such as drawing, music and drama, will help to facilitate participation.

- 6.3.15 The Council must recognise that 'one size does not fit all' and tailor its engagement activities to its target groups. This requires both clarity about the desired outcomes, including the target stakeholder/demographic base, and a sound knowledge of the local communities. It also needs a shift in approach from ticking the 'consultation done' box to real understanding and interpretation of the relevant issues for different groups of stakeholders. This information needs to be communicated succinctly and in plain English.
- 6.3.16 Summary leaflets should be provided in support of major engagement documents. These should signpost interested readers to sources of more detailed information.
- 6.3.17 The report on our traffic case study discusses the importance of providing the public feedback following any consultation exercise. The Council cannot just ask for people's views and not report back the outcomes of the exercise and the process for, and reasons behind, reaching the decisions made. Such an approach is likely to discourage engagement on the next occasion.
- 6.3.18 Whilst the Council has already adopted a Communications Strategy, Departmental officers need guidance on good communication practices. There is also a need to agree processes for the production of all Council publications, including the extent to which services should involve the Communications Unit in this aspect of their work.
- 6.3.19 We were constrained to running our experimental message board to just four weeks and, for resource and timing reasons, were unable to support the experiment with a publicity campaign. The life of the experiment was too short a time to allow the community to learn how to use it and to recognise its potential value. The facility itself proved slow and difficult to use, partly we suspect due to the pace with which the experiment was established, and this did deter some potential contributors. Despite the limitations of the experiment, we believe that the message board was successful in providing members of the community with an alternative way of airing their views and that this is of particular value to some of the 'hard to reach' sectors of the community, such as the housebound and those working long or anti-social hours. The Chief Executive and the Publications Panel have supported the establishment of a permanent message board. We are pleased that this initiative is to form part of the upgrading work on the Council's website. The Council will need to be clear about the purpose of the facility, including whether it is intended to be a vehicle to enable members of the community to engage with each other as well as with the Council. Appropriate support structures must be put in place to support the operation of the message board. These include the necessary security systems and officer training to ensure that posted messages are responded to appropriately, since 'formal' responses will lead to the stifling of public debate. The potential of using the message board to establish 'virtual communities' should also be considered. The new facility must be properly resourced and its launch supported by a high profile publicity campaign and training for all involved, including the community.

6.3.20 Community engagement around planning issues is a specialist area and one which is fast developing with the work being undertaken on the preparation of the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). A number of members of the Executive have also raised the need to look at this particular area of engagement and our own knowledge of the public interest generated by planning issues has led us to the view that this is an area where a specific review should be undertaken in due course. At the specific request of the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development and Housing, we will be working with officers involved in the development and implementation of the Local Development Framework (LDF) and the SCI.

(The issue of Communications is considered in more detail in both our case study reports.)

Recommendations relating to Communicating Effectively

(additional to any included within our case study reports)

- 7 The Council must determine and clearly set out the purpose of the message board and put into place appropriate structures to support its operation. This includes the provision of an appropriate budget to manage the message board and training for officers across all Directorates and the public on its purpose and use.**
- 8 The launch of the message board facility should be supported by a high profile publicity campaign, which should incorporate training sessions on the use of the facility.**
- 9 Communication strategies must be tailored to the community we seek to communicate with such that they are likely to be successful in the context of that community.**
- 10 Translation of documents, or the offer to translate documents, should only take place within a broader strategy that has identified translation as the most effective vehicle to communicate with a specified community, and should be balanced against the broader objective of facilitating such communities fully participating in the social and political life of the wider Harrow Community.**
- 11 English language training should be strongly supported to facilitate access of minority groups to the wider Harrow Community. We see this as constituting Investing to Save.**
- 12 A process is agreed and established around the production of all Council publications. This should include:
 - a) Registration of documents issued: A requirement that all services should notify the Communications Unit of all publications which are being produced in significant numbers (the threshold limit of which needs to be agreed), and sends them a copy of the document together****

with the numbers produced, whether Communications are involved in the production of the document or not.

- b) Criteria for communications involvement: Criteria should be set for services to use in determining when the Communications unit should be called to assist in the production of such publications.**

6.4 RESPECTING AND VALUING THE COMMUNITY

Findings

- 6.4.1 There is good correlation between the views of both staff (both those working at the frontline and those serving in managerial positions) and community representatives that the majority of the Council's engagement activities involve the giving of information, consultations and, to a lesser extent, collaborative working. There is little in the way of involvement or empowerment activities.
- 6.4.2 The community feels that consultation activities are sometimes undertaken when decisions have already been taken. The purpose is simply to 'tick the box'.
- 6.4.3 There is a distrust of the Council's purposes and intentions.
- 6.4.4 The community wants a chance to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes.
- 6.4.5 The recent MORI residents' survey showed that 85% of residents are interested in what the Council does. 35% of residents want more of a say in the Council's work but 10% are not interested in what the Council does.
- 6.4.6 There is not a consistent approach across services to the issue of voluntary sector capacity building and the provision of support/incentives to facilitate participation.

Conclusions

- 6.4.7 Over a third of residents would like a greater say in the Council's work. But the Council must also recognise, and respect, the fact that a small percentage of people will not want to engage with the Council.
- 6.4.8 Our evidence showed that those members of the community who are interested in what the Council does often feel that their input is neither respected nor valued and is given scant regard. Both our case study reports cover this issue and highlight the importance of listening to, respecting and valuing the community.
- 6.4.9 The perception is that many engagement exercises are simply undertaken to meet government targets rather than to provide an opportunity to influence thinking.
- 6.4.10 Past experiences have contributed to the community's distrust of the Council. The Council must demonstrate its commitment to true engagement in order to win back the confidence and respect of the community. This will take time. Individual

instances of 'paper exercises' will set back any overall progress that the Council may make.

- 6.4.11 We believe that the community will be more prepared to engage with the Council at all the levels on the engagement spectrum if the purpose of the exercise is clear from the outset and there is an agreed understanding of the desired outcomes. Not all exercises considered will necessarily be valid. Careful consideration of the objectives and scope of the exercise will inform a decision on this. Clarity and honesty about the purpose of any exercise and its desired outcomes is essential for determining whether some form of an engagement activity is/is not appropriate and, if to be embarked upon, the format it should follow. Automatically following the engagement route will not always be the right way forward.
- 6.4.12 The important issue for the public is the quality of the exercise rather than purely the number of issues on which engagement is offered. Engaging with the community in a way which is not transparent can simply lead to disaffection and consultation fatigue. The purpose of participation is to make a difference, whether by giving information, consulting, involving, collaborating or empowering. People have to believe that they can influence outcomes before they are prepared to spend their time participating. We, therefore, endorse the Chief Executive's view that the Council needs to be more disciplined about the way that it selects the issues on which it engages with the community as a whole and which might be better dealt with as local agenda issues within the area framework.
- 6.4.13 The Council must recognise that time is also precious to the community and that many representatives already have unrealistic demands made of them. Smaller community organisations often have very lean structures which lead to particular challenges in participating as fully as they might wish. The Council needs, therefore, to examine its expectations alongside the support which it can provide to such organisations to facilitate their engagement.
- 6.4.14 Consideration needs to be given to supporting some community groups, particularly those which are less well-established and harder to reach, to gain the skills and confidence to participate in the Council's processes. The independent tenant adviser employed on the Rayners Lane Estate prior to its handover to a housing association played an instrumental role in empowering the local residents. There will, inevitably, be resource implications in providing this support although we note that capacity building is already built into the proposals for implementing the community engagement strategy.
- 6.4.15 There is also a need to look at the support which is available to individuals who wish to take part in planned engagement activities. This covers not only physical accessibility in terms of venue and timing, but also their appropriateness for different sectors of the community. Creche facilities, for example, would open out more activities to single parents whilst carers will have other needs.

- 6.4.16 We also believe that the Council should examine its policy on providing incentives to individuals to ensure that people are not left 'out of pocket' by their participation.
- 6.4.17 From our own perspective, we are very aware of the many hours that the co-opted community representatives serving on this review group have voluntarily given us and wonder how long we can continue to make such demands. Many of our reviews are undertaken at some depth and demand a significant time commitment from our co-optees. Whilst scrutiny is currently structured in such a way that our in depth reviews are undertaken outside our formal Committee meetings, we note that there is an inconsistency insofar as the co-opted representatives of formal Council committees do now receive a small payment in recognition of their services. There are no doubt other examples of this inconsistent approach.
- 6.4.18 The Council also needs to recognise and respect the range of skills and experience which is based in the voluntary sector and to open itself up to learning from these. We take on board the point made to us by our expert witnesses Richard Wilson and Patrick Lewis that the voluntary sector has much experience in engaging with the community. Indeed we have seen this first hand in the work being undertaken by Youth Akili. The Council should look at ways in which it can tap into this knowledge base and also share its own experiences and good practices. One way of doing this would be to establish a mutual shadowing scheme between the voluntary sector and the Council, which would also strengthen partnership working.
- 6.4.19 Both the case studies identified the need to improve the way information on the outcome of engagement exercises is fed back to individual respondents as well as to the community at large. The failure to do this simply reinforces the community's perception that its views are not valued.
- 6.4.20 There can sometimes be a perception that consultation exercises are referenda. There are occasions when, for various reasons, the ultimate decision is not the view expressed by the majority of respondents. This leads to the public belief that the decision had been pre-determined and the consultation was undertaken merely to tick the box. Where there are genuine reasons for taking a decision contrary to the majority view, these must be explained publicly, clearly, transparently and honestly. To minimise feelings of disillusionment, there must be clarity about the boundaries of what is/is not possible, the decision making process and any implementation timetables at the start of the process.

Recommendations relating to Respecting and Valuing the Community
(additional to any included within our case study reports)

- 13 The Council should consider establishing a shadowing scheme whereby Council officers could be placed in voluntary sector organisations to exchange experiences and share good practices and vice versa.**

7 ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

Findings

- 7.1 The Housing Benefit Service has improved to such an extent in recent years that it is now excellent. The process of achieving this involved significant changes to client engagement procedures. Initially this involved a reduction in public contact hours. Subsequently, it involved targeting resources to disadvantaged groups, reducing support for non-disadvantaged claimants whilst guaranteeing a 24 hour service for properly completed claims.

Conclusions

- 7.2 The net result to the changed approach to the provision of the Housing Benefit Service has been a better service with a smaller overall budget. We believe that this is a good example of an approach from which other parts of the organisation could possibly learn.
- 7.3 There is no right answer to effective community engagement. It is an iterative process and it is essential that the organisation as a whole learns from each activity undertaken. As officers and Councillors are likely to have had a range of different experiences, the importance of strengthening organisational learning must be recognised. The Council needs to encourage innovation and creativity and be prepared for some initiatives to be less successful than others. The important thing is for the organisation to share the learning, both from the most and least successful examples, and to ensure that this information is readily accessible for the next time a similar situation is being addressed. The social inclusion case study group has recommended the establishment of a network of staff experienced and knowledgeable on regeneration issues. We feel that this approach would be very usefully extended to a number of other specialist disciplines across the Council.
- 7.4 In learning from past experiences, we would encourage the Council to recognise that the voluntary sector is a good resource of accessing different communities and engaging through innovative practices. This resource needs to be tapped into so that the skills can be transferred into the Authority. Similarly we believe that the Council itself has much experience and knowledge to offer and would urge it to put in place processes to share its own good practices more widely, both internally and externally.

Recommendation relating to Organisational Learning *(additional to any included within our case study reports)*

- 14 Those Departments providing technical support to the public (such as the duty planning officer, crossover applications, Governor services) should consider similar innovation to service provision as adopted by Housing Benefits. Initially, such innovation might challenge traditional measures of community service levels. However, we believe new information channels and targeted services are more likely to come forward where officer time is 'freed up' in this way.**

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 We have stated above that we believe that the Council is well-placed to develop its approach to community engagement if it wishes to do so. Our findings, conclusions and recommendations point out ways in which the Council can improve. We recognise that these will almost certainly have significant resource implications, not least in officer time, but believe that it will be difficult for the authority to make any significant progress without real investment. The Council must recognise that effective community engagement must be properly resourced, both financially and with regard to officer and Member time. It cannot be addressed through an 'add on' to people's jobs. The Council must determine its priorities.

APPENDIX 1

Scope of Hear/Say review

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - SCOPE

1	SUBJECT	Scrutiny Review of Community Engagement
2	COMMITTEE	O&S Committee
3	REVIEW GROUP	<p>Joint Leaders – Julia Smith & Cllr Jean Lammiman</p> <p>Members: Cllrs Nana Asante, Brian Gate, Ann Groves, Mark Ingram, Kara, John Nickolay, Paul Osborn, Anjana Patel.</p> <p>Co-optees: Chris Noyce, Roger Smith, Adam Hassan</p>
4	AIMS/ OBJECTIVES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 To develop/understand how Harrow can have an effective approach to community engagement 2 To contribute to the development of the community engagement strategy to ensure that the process adopted promotes a Council that is open, accessible and continuously engaged with its diverse population in all possible areas. 3 To gather evidence on engagement with a view to strengthening the Council’s community engagement practices 4 To take evidence from the community on its needs and wishes for, and commitment to, engagement 5 To recommend to the Executive measures to improve the Council’s engagement practices. <p>For the purposes of this review, community engagement is defined as activities designed to give the local community the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process. The continuum of community engagement covers information, consultation, involvement , collaboration and empowerment activities.</p>
5	MEASURES OF SUCCESS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 The adoption by the Executive of scrutiny recommendations; 2 The inclusion of scrutiny recommendations in the Community Engagement Strategy at a relevant time of its development 3 The creation of opportunities for the community to influence the development of the community engagement strategy; 4 An increase in the understanding of Council

		<p>members of the relevance and importance of true and effective community engagement;</p> <p>5 The agreement of a strategy which takes account of the needs and wishes of partners, stakeholders, local communities and residents.</p>
6	SCOPE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 To review the existing practices and mechanisms used by the Council to engage the community 2 To obtain community input into this review 3 To consider best practice and innovation in community engagement 4 To consider Harrow's performance against best practice 5 To formulate good practice recommendations for submission to the Executive <p>The scope will include examination of 2 case studies focusing on community engagement practices in relation to traffic and transportation issues and to future social inclusion/regeneration initiatives. These case studies will focus on examining and improving existing practices particularly on a local area basis and identifying good practice in community engagement/participation activities</p> <p>Consideration of the Open Budget Proposal is excluded from this scope</p>
7	SERVICE PRIORITIES (Corporate/Dept)	Becoming better and 'smarter' at the way that we engage with the community is integral to the corporate priorities of strengthening Harrow's communities, valuing our customers and impacting through partnerships
8	REVIEW SPONSOR	Lynne McAdam
9	ACCOUNTABLE MANAGER	Bindu Arjoon
10	SCRUTINY OFFICER	Frances Hawkins
11	ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	To be determined
12	EXTERNAL INPUT	Stakeholders, partners, agencies, experts, advisers, public, community groups
13	METHODOLOGY	<p>Examination of Government priorities and vision for the future of Local Government</p> <p>Consideration of Audit Commission engagement targets/indicators</p> <p>Mapping of Council's current consultation mechanisms and structures</p> <p>Audit and review of current and future consultations and</p>

		<p>costs</p> <p>Desktop research, including best practice and innovation nationally and internationally</p> <p>Case studies on consultation on highway & traffic schemes & on social inclusion pilots</p> <p>Internet input from the public through a message board</p> <p>Feedback from, and where appropriate observation of, Policy & Partnership events with the community during the development of the strategy</p> <p>Feedback from a workshop of Community Consultative Forum</p> <p>Focus groups of staff and Members</p> <p>Consideration of draft Community Engagement Strategy</p> <p>Feedback on the consultation practices employed in relation to current NHS development proposals for Northwick Park and Mount Vernon Hospitals</p>
14	EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS	The need to engage with minority and hard to reach groups is an integral part of this review
15	ASSUMPTIONS/ CONSTRAINTS	To be identified
16	TIMESCALE	Report to be completed by November 2005
17	RESOURCE COMMITMENTS	Members – 10 meetings supported by Officers – 30 days each for scrutiny officer & administrative support
18	REPORT AUTHOR	Frances Hawkins


APPENDIX 2

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CMT	Corporate Management Team
CPA	Corporate Performance Assessment (the way that the Government assesses the performance of every local authority in the country)
CPZ	Controlled Parking Zone
GOL	Government Office for London (the regional government office for the capital)
HAVS	Harrow Association of Voluntary Service
HCRE	Harrow Council for Racial Equality
HFTRA	Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents'Associations
KLOE	Key Lines of Enquiry (which are to be measured in the new Corporate Performance Assessment process)
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LDF	Local Development Framework (the newly introduced national process for planning for physical developments)
NWW	New Ways of Working
ODPM	Office of the deputy Prime Minister
SCI	Statement of Community Involvement (required to be produced under the LDF – sets out the standards to be achieved and the approaches to be applied)
TfL	Traffic for London
TRA	Tenants' and Residents' Association
VFM	Value for Money

APPENDIX 3

The following spectrum of community engagement, recognised by the International Association for Public Participation, sets the widely accepted traditional steps of the spectrum against their related objectives and promises to the public

				
INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Objective	Objective	Objective	Objective	Objective
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public and private concerns are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision making in the hands of the public
Promise to the public	Promise to the public	Promise to the public	Promise to the public	Promise to the public
We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your concerns, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	To place final decision making in the hands of the public

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**Hear/
Say**



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difference
through
listening
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Scrutiny Review of Community Engagement

Social inclusion Case study

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Scrutiny is an independent, councillor-led function, working with local people to improve services

Membership of case study group:

Councillors Nana Asante, Mark Ingram, Jean Lammiman, Anjana Patel and community co-optee Adam Hassan

Dr Raechel Kenney served as a co-opted community member on the case study group until 17 October 2005

The group has been jointly led by Mr Adam Hassan with Councillor Mark Ingram (until May 2005) , Cllr Anjana Patel (5 June -15 September 2005) and Cllr Nana Asante (from 15 September 2005)

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2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Current perceptions are that Council engagement takes place only to meet Government funding targets.
- 2.2 Genuine engagement requires residents to believe their views will affect decisions. This is particularly important when dealing with the socially excluded, and requires a change to Harrow's corporate culture. Stakeholders, Councillors and officers must all be involved in all elements of the engagement process: from design and delivery to evaluation. Engagement must become 'part of the day job' of officers, who must be trained, resourced and assessed accordingly.
- 2.3 Such change will need to be managed sensitively, and the benefits to the Council, as well as to Stakeholders, emphasised. Good practice should be identified and celebrated. Clear excellence criteria should be identified based on:
- Transparency of objectives, processes, agendas and conclusions
 - Evidence of effective listening to stakeholder concerns and aspirations
 - Evidence of mutual value and respect.
- 2.4 Changing public perceptions is vital, but will only happen with real change. All engagement processes must achieve the 3 attributes above, both before and after they happen. To achieve this we recommend change in the following main areas:
- Knowing the community
 - Earning public trust and valuing the community
 - Communicating effectively
 - Youth Services
 - Rayners Lane Estate and tenant participation
 - Cultural and structural change
 - Grant funding
 - Toolkit for good practice in engagement
 - Role of Councillors

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

KNOWING THE COMMUNITY

- 1 As a priority, the Council must identify and develop its connections with, and knowledge of, its communities and put in place processes to share these connections and this knowledge across the Council and with partners.**

EARNING PUBLIC TRUST AND VALUING THE COMMUNITY

- 2 The Council should only decide to enter into an engagement activity after careful consideration of the purpose of the exercise, the intended outputs, the desired outcomes and the way in which they are to be measured and evaluated, from which a final decision on the real value of the proposal can be made. There are times when engagement could be inappropriate.**
- 3 When engagements are undertaken, the initial information must honestly and clearly set out the parameters of the exercise, the options available and their implications, and the decision making process and timetable.**
- 4 Feedback should be an integral part of engagement. Views offered in response must be listened and replied to. This could be in writing or by email to individual comments/queries or, where the numbers concerned are great, by publishing overall results on the Internet. A clear statement must be given to explain why particular ideas are not being accepted.**
- 5 Unless there are clear overriding reasons to the contrary, funding for community initiatives should follow public interest and support for projects.**

COMMUNICATIONS

- 6 All public documents should be written in plain English.**
- 7 Officers writing public documents should be trained in plain English writing skills.**
- 8 The Audit & Risk Management Service should include an examination of the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of engagement activities when examining any Directorate function as part of its annual work programme.**
- 9 A communications plan should form an integral part of the initial project plan of any engagement activity.**
- 10 Consideration should be given to ways to enable those with difficulties in communicating in written English to participate in engagement activities. Where applicable, advice should be sought from relevant voluntary bodies.**
- 11 Engagement documents should not be automatically translated into minority languages but, where appropriate, alternative ways should be**

sought to enable members from such communities to participate. This could, for example, involve interpreted meetings, engagement through local voluntary bodies, or indeed the use of bilingual community representatives as the project link.

- 12 The Council and its partner bodies should examine ways of increasing the support available to those who do not speak or read English to develop these skills.

YOUTH SERVICES

- 13 The Council develops a new framework for the commissioning of youth programmes based upon the following principles:

- a. that services to mainstream youth are delivered by voluntary and community groups;
- b. that statutory services are delivered in tandem with voluntary and community groups;
- c. that professionals support voluntary and community groups by, for instance, assisting them to meet minimum child protection standards;
- d. that services are designed and delivered to address the needs of youth on the edge of statutory need: eg those that are at risk of presenting through the criminal justice system;
- e. that flexibility in the use of Borough assets encourages the Youth Service to refocus its resources away from Community Youth Centres, and toward joint working with schools, children centres, and existing community assets and groups.

- 14 The High Performing Harrow Project should be used to develop effective local Performance Indicators for the Youth Service.

- 15 The Council should extend the target age group for which it provides outreach / criminal justice related services.

RAYNERS ESTATE AND TENANT PARTICIPATION

- 16 The Council should recognise that in transferring its housing properties to another social landlord, as has taken place on the Rayners Lane Estate, it still retains its other responsibilities to local residents. All services should, therefore, seek to work in partnership with any new landlord in identifying and addressing identified local needs.

- 17 High Performing Harrow should be used to develop, in conjunction with the Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents Associations' (HFTRA), local Performance Indicators to capture performance in relation to the functioning of Tenants' and Residents' Associations (TRA). To assist in this, the annual

estate questionnaire should include a question on how well the relevant estate TRA is felt to represent each tenant.

CULTURAL AND STRUCTURAL CHANGE

- 18 **Community engagement needs to be at the heart of the work the Council does and space and time must be found for it in the job descriptions and roles that officers play. This will allow the Council to join up its work and knowledge and achieve better efficiency and efficacy. It will also improve the perception of Harrow Council by the people it serves.**
- 19 **Harrow People should be used to improve the public's knowledge about the way the Council operates and that this is supported by increased and innovative outreach work.**
- 20 **The Council devises a programme of outreach activities for the next Local Democracy Week, focussed on helping the public to understand what the Council does and how it is run.**
- 21 **A simple booklet or leaflet explaining the Council's structure and how it works would be useful for the public, officers and councillors. A flow chart of how to get things done would be appropriate, together with a 'How-to guide' of how to engage with the Council.**
- 22 **An informal network should be created of staff with experience and knowledge of regeneration issues for use as an organisational 'hothouse' of expertise to support the regeneration unit as/when required. Both First Contact and the Communications Unit should be involved in the production of these documents.**
- 23 **All Service plans should include a section on community engagement, showing what are the service's plans, timescales and resources for community engagement, together with an assessment of the expected service delivery outcomes and performance measures. A system should be established to capture this information.**
- 24 **In the interests of transparency and to facilitate engagement, all Departmental service plans should be published on the Internet. The Internet and intranet should be delivered from a single common database. In the interests of transparency, all material on the intranet should be available on the Internet unless there is good reason to do otherwise.**

GRANT FUNDING

- 25 **A 'risk pot' of funding should be identified from the main Grants budget for use in supporting new and emerging community groups on the lines in paragraph 11.2. This initiative should be incorporated into any future Local Area Agreement (LAA) submission to the Government Office for London**

(GOL). The funds for this pilot should be separately identified from the main Grants budget.

26 Consideration should be given to establishing a pilot scheme to provide funding for 'Rewards for Achievement' for work being done by frontline, grassroots organisations, based on past (unfunded) performance. This pilot should also be funded from the main Grants budget.

27 The Grants Advisory Panel should also consider dividing its available funds into discretely identified blocks.

GOOD PRACTICE IN ENGAGEMENT

28 The proposed toolkit of good engagement practices should be made available on both the intranet and the Internet.

ROLE OF COUNCILLORS

29 A member development programme providing guidance on the role and responsibilities of Ward Councillors, particularly in the context of the Government's vibrant local leadership agenda, should be developed in time for the new Councillor intake after the 2006 elections

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 Our evidence has been drawn from a wide range of sources, including views from members of the community, expert evidence and best practices in other Authorities, officer input and our own experiences, both as Ward Councillors and as individuals, and the results of the MORI residents' survey.
- 4.2 We have engaged directly with members of the community with a survey for adults and other activities for young people at the Rayners Lane Fun Day, through a workshop with the Community Consultative Forum, and at our meeting with Youth Akili, a grassroots youth group, introduced to us by the Somali Family Support Group.
- 4.3 We have heard expert evidence from Patrick Lewis, Head of Harlesden and Stonebridge Neighbourhood Regeneration Team, Brent Council and Jim Shutt and Alan Malcher, Warden Housing Association.
- 4.4 We have met with Paul Clark, Director of Children's Services and Richard Segalov, Transitions Group Manager, Children's Services as well as housing and regeneration officers. We have, of course, also drawn on the findings of the focus groups as well as the other work undertaken as part of the review.

KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

5 KNOWING THE COMMUNITY

5.1 Key Findings

- 5.1.1 Harrow has many rich and diverse communities which are not usually geographically based. Each community has its own culture.
- 5.1.2 This community structure is constantly evolving.
- 5.1.3 Knowledge of the community is not currently shared across the Council but is researched and recorded in individual service areas.
- 5.1.4 Some groups are harder to reach but these are not only the disadvantaged groups. Young professionals, for example, tend not to engage with the Council.
- 5.1.5 Some minority groups feel that they are ignored and marginalised by the Council. They often do not input into the decision making process and feel that their interests are not represented by Councillors.

5.2 Conclusions

- 5.2.1 We believe that knowing the community is central to effective community engagement. The community is a complex organism which we must understand to fairly balance the competing views and demands which any engagement activity is likely to face. We acknowledge that the use of any developed community expertise against the views of the wider community can be a dilemma, with issues about the 'representativeness' of particular groups and potential domination by the 'usual suspects'. We accept, however, the expert evidence from Richard Wilson, Director of Involve, an organisation dedicated to improving public engagement. He stressed that all views were legitimate and that the skill lay in achieving a fair balance in assessing all views put forward. Perhaps the greatest challenge is capturing the fact that the 'community' is forever changing and forever evolving, so that all engagement mechanisms must evolve and change.
- 5.2.2 We also accept Richard Wilson's advice that the traditional view of 'hard to reach' groups is now less relevant and that, for example, young white professionals are more likely to fall into this category than some of the accepted disadvantaged groups, with whom contacts are increasingly being strengthened.
- 5.2.3 We have recognised that the community structure is organic and some form of exclusion is almost inevitable in any engagement exercise. It is, therefore, critical to accept that 'one size does not fit all' and to identify clear objectives and a good information base before starting any engagement activity. We believe that the area service delivery structure is well placed to develop this essential bank of information and that the role of the Area Champions and Managers should be critical to this task. We note that some of this work has already

started. However, it is important to note that Area working cannot address the reality that some 'communities' do not confine themselves to geographical areas. Evidence suggests, for example, that other drivers determine where and how young people meet. The development of structures, such as corporate databases, which enable the sharing of this information is essential.

5.2.4 As the local scene is constantly evolving, with some local groups ceasing to function whilst new ones are created, close links between staff and the local community are essential to ensure that the knowledge base is kept up-dated.

5.2.5 As part of our evidence gathering, we received a submission from the Harrow Council for Racial Equality (HCRE) recommending that a specific engagement structure should be established for the black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. We do not, however, feel that this is a positive way forward as we believe that the Community Consultative Forum already provides BME communities with an effective and inclusive means of inputting into the Council's decision-making process together with other local community groups. We believe that in the interests of Community Cohesion the Council should work at encouraging involvement of all its constituent communities rather than set up parallel structures. It is important in doing so to recognise that some communities will need more support and to commit to providing relevant support. It is crucial therefore that the Council develops knowledge of its communities to facilitate the involvement of all local communities, including BME groups, in the work of the Council.

5.3 *Recommendations relating to Knowing the Community*

1 As a priority, the Council must identify and develop its connections with, and knowledge of, its communities and put in place processes to share these connections and this knowledge across the Council and with partners.

6 EARNING PUBLIC TRUST AND VALUING THE COMMUNITY

6.1 Key Findings

- 6.1.1 The MORI residents' survey showed that 85% of residents are interested in what the Council does, with 35% wanting more of a say in the Council's work. Only 10% of residents say that they are not interested in what the Council does.
- 6.1.2 Members of the public have told us that there are issues around the Council not really listening to them. We heard that there was a perception of a lack of respect for community views as well as a culture of saying 'no' without really listening to the question. People feel that their views are not really valued.
- 6.1.3 Members of the community have said that they want real engagement which seeks mutually acceptable outcomes and that people often feel that there is little point in responding to engagement exercises as the Council has already made up its mind.
- 6.1.4 There is a lack of trust in the Council's motives when engaging/consulting resulting, in part, from past negative experiences. A credibility gap exists.
- 6.1.5 The Council's democratic processes are not always transparent to the community and the current arrangements for public input into the formal Committee processes are limiting.
- 6.1.6 Many services do not automatically feed back the results of their engagement/consultation activities. Whilst our survey at the Rayners Lane funday showed that most people rated the Council as 'about average' at feeding back the results of engagements, we believe that this could be a reflection of the particular situation on the estate, which had received an enormous amount of effective officer input prior to the handover of the properties to Warden Housing Association (see below). As shown by other evidence that we have received, including the responses to the surveys undertaken as part of the traffic case study, and officer input, this is not the case in many other areas.
- 6.1.7 Production of the well-supported Wealdstone Active Community newsletter has ceased because of funding difficulties.

6.2 Conclusions

- 6.2.1 We believe that the lack of trust in the Council could stem from past experiences of engagement exercises where views were not taken on board and no adequate explanation given for the reasons for reaching a different decision. It could be argued that some members of the community are suffering from 'consultation fatigue'. As discussed in the report on the main review, our audit of planned engagement activities has shown that an enormous amount of work is being undertaken across the Council, some of which does not appear to be well integrated with other initiatives. Coupled with past perceptions of not having

been listened to or not being told the outcomes of their efforts, the public may well feel disinclined to continue to participate.

- 6.2.2 Poor responses to engagement exercises, in turn, lead to an assumption that people do not wish to be involved and the consequent management of services without public input. The MORI residents' survey, however, challenges this assumption.
- 6.2.3 Honesty and transparency at the outset, both about the purpose of the engagement exercise, the process and the boundaries of what is/ is not possible, are essential to earning the community's trust.
- 6.2.4 We would stress that simply 'ticking the box' to show that the public have been consulted is not enough and that there must be a genuine commitment to looking for the mutually acceptable outcomes which are sought by the public.
- 6.2.5 Conflicting opinions will, nevertheless, almost certainly arise in any engagement exercise and decisions may sometimes be made which are contrary to the majority view. Open, transparent and sensitive communication of the reasons for reaching all decisions is critical to developing community trust. Evidence from the Chief Executive confirmed our view that sincerity about the real purpose and possible outcomes from any engagement exercise, plus explaining honestly and transparently the reasons for making a decision and following this through, are key in dealing with difficult decision making situations. Promises should only be made if they can be fulfilled.
- 6.2.6 Inconsistent feedback was another issue highlighted by the evidence. Failure to reply to participants and to let them know the outcome of engagement activities contributes to the community's feelings that it is not valued. Overall, we do not believe that the Council has paid enough attention to feeding back the outcome of engagement processes.
- 6.2.7 The Council needs to listen harder to what the community is saying and move towards a 'can do' response to its wishes. Some community initiatives with modest resource implications have far reaching impact and not supporting them, without good reason, can serve as a disincentive to future engagement.

6.3 *Recommendations relating to Earning Public Trust and Valuing the Community*

- 2 The Council should only decide to enter into an engagement activity after careful consideration of the purpose of the exercise, the intended outputs, the desired outcomes and the way in which they are to be measured and evaluated, from which a final decision on the real value of the proposal can be made. There are times when engagement could be inappropriate.**
- 3 When engagement exercises are undertaken, the initial information must honestly and clearly set out the parameters of the exercise, the options available and their implications, and the decision making process and timetable.**

- 4 Feedback should be an integral part of engagement. Views offered in response must be listened and replied to. This could be in writing or by email to individual comments/queries or, where the numbers concerned are great, by publishing overall results on the internet. A clear statement must be given to explain why particular ideas are not being accepted.**
- 5 Unless there are clear overriding reasons to the contrary, funding for community initiatives should follow public interest and support for projects.**

7 COMMUNICATIONS

7.1 Findings

- 7.1.1 Some engagement documents are neither well written in plain English nor produced in an accessible format. Major documents are not always supported by a summary leaflet.
- 7.1.2 There are currently no indicators in place to measure the effectiveness of engagement documents or activities.
- 7.1.3 Getting initial communications right is critical to engaging with as many people as possible. Engagement activities are sometimes relegated to becoming an 'add on' to the planning of major initiatives, without enough thought being given to factoring in the activity at the project planning stage,
- 7.1.4 People are sometimes excluded from engagement activities by simply not receiving the original papers.
- 7.1.5 The elderly, those without a knowledge of written English, people with visual or learning difficulties are amongst the sectors of the community who may experience difficulties with written communications. Some voluntary organisations have offered to assist in planning engagement documents/activities which will be accessible to their members.
- 7.1.6 Engagement with minority group residents is challenging. Addressing such challenges by translating documents is rarely an adequate response. Translation is expensive, not everyone is not literate in their own language, and translation was found to be of very limited value. Some people also prefer to engage through community channels. Translation can also further the isolation of minority groups from the wider Harrow Community, an unintended but serious consequence for civic engagement. In such cases alternative and appropriate means should be found to allow members from these communities to participate. Similar measures will need to be considered for other groups, such as those with learning difficulties, who may not be able to access the written word.
- 7.1.7 The use of imaginative and creative approaches and all available media, such as drawing, music and drama, will help to facilitate participation.

7.2 Conclusions

- 7.2.1 We believe that we need to improve the way that we communicate with the public. We have seen both good and poor examples of written communications. The first step must be to ensure that when we communicate in writing, whether with individuals or in publications, this is done in plain English and produced in an accessible form.
- 7.2.2 Well-summarised leaflets should be produced of any major engagement documents since most members of the public do not bother reading anything

weightier. The primary concern of most people is how the proposal is going to affect them personally. Leaflets should, therefore, clearly set out the pros and cons of all options available and direct any interested readers to the main document for further information. All Council documents should display the Council's logo to ensure that they are easily distinguishable from the plethora of junk mail which most households now receive and automatically bin.

- 7.2.3 Alternative delivery mechanisms (email / local groups etc.) should complement or replace traditional delivery, which is notoriously unreliable. In particular, leaflets are notoriously ineffective means of communication. Political parties have long recognised the value of delivering addressed and enveloped mail as opposed to leaflets.
- 7.2.4 We feel that the issue of translation of documents is a specialised and highly sensitive area, language being closely associated with cultural identity. We believe that there is a distinction between documents relating to service provision and engagement activities. We do not believe that it is necessary to automatically translate all engagement documents into minority languages, as this will not always be appropriate or relevant, given that not everybody is able to read their own mother tongue. Neither does the automatic translation of all documents necessarily provide the best Value for Money. The Council is already supporting those who do not speak English to learn the language in a variety of ways, including through its Extended schools and IT courses. We believe that this is the right way forward and feel that the Council should work with its partner bodies to increase the language support provided. Ultimately, this empowers individuals to participate within the mainstream life of the community. We feel that translations of documents should be available on request.
- 7.2.5 We accept that this approach could be felt to exclude some parts of the community from participation but believe that the right way forward is to ensure that an appropriate basket of approaches is in place for any engagement activity. This need demonstrates the previously discussed importance of developing a good knowledge of the local community.
- 7.2.6 Traditional written communications will not always be the most appropriate means of engaging with all sectors of the community, some of whom, such as those with learning difficulties or visual impairment, will find this difficult to access. Creative participation methods need to be considered when seeking the views of people from these groups. Voluntary organisations have offered their expertise in helping the Council to facilitate their members to participate in engagement activities and their help should be enlisted when planning any engagement exercise.
- 7.2.7 Similarly, communicating through speech can be a barrier which needs to be recognised and taken into account, as well highlighted by the recent event focussed on improving communications with deaf and hearing impaired people held during the Learn to Sign Week.

- 7.2.8 Creative thinking is also important for effective engagement with those who are able to access written documents but may be little inclined to do so. We have seen examples where both young and old people, for example, have been encouraged to participate in activities which incorporated an element of fun.
- 7.2.9 The use of engagement mechanisms should be tailored to the needs and attributes of the target groups, perhaps via a table such as that below:
- 7.2.10 Maximum score captures the impact (or 'noticeability'), cost, flexibility and targeting capacity of the medium. Other scores allow for the fact that for certain groups the medium is not accessible / or is otherwise inappropriate for a group. Scored out of 10, 10 being excellent, 0 being not suitable

	Max score	Group A eg.hearing impaired	Group B: eg Somali speakers/non English speakers	Group C: Working long hrs, with internet access
Leaflet	2	2	1	2
Letter	3	3	2	3
Internet	5	5	1	5
Own-language internet	5	-	4	-
Personal interview	8	8	8	3
Public display (no facilitator)	3	2	2	1
Public display (with facilitator)	5	3	3	1
Fun activity	7	6	6	1

- 7.2.11 Reaching out to people also requires a greater use of supplementary outlets for communicating with the community, such as community notice boards, libraries, supermarkets, GP surgeries and similar public access points. A well designed and eye catching poster campaign using a brand can be very effective in getting the message across, as demonstrated by the approach Croydon adopted when running their referendum.
- 7.2.12 New technologies, such as online message boards, can be particularly effective in engaging those sectors of the community who may otherwise be excluded from participation, for instance commuters in full time employment, those employed on shift work, the housebound or those with family responsibilities. They could also be used to better effect in enabling greater communication between citizens, an area which seems to us to be still in the early stages of development. We do recognise, however, that the digital divide does still exist and therefore stress that electronic communications should, in the near future at least, be a supplementary rather than the sole means of engagement. Involvement of libraries may be a means of ensuring access to electronic engagement tools and this needs to be promoted.

7.3 *Recommendations relating to Communications*

- 6 All public documents should be written in plain English.**
- 7 Officers writing public documents should be trained in plain English writing skills.**
- 8 The Audit & Risk Management Service should include an examination of the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of engagement activities when examining any Directorate function as part of its annual work programme.**
- 9 A communications plan should form an integral part of the initial project plan of any engagement activity.**
- 10 Consideration should be given to ways to enable those with difficulties in communicating in written English to participate in engagement activities. Where applicable, advice should be sought from relevant voluntary bodies.**
- 11 Engagement documents should not be automatically translated into minority languages but, where appropriate, alternative ways should be sought to enable members from such communities to participate. This could, for example, involve interpreted meetings, engagement through local voluntary bodies, or indeed the use of bilingual community representatives as the project link.**
- 12 The Council and its partner bodies should examine ways of increasing the support available to those who do not speak or read English to develop these skills to facilitate access of minority groups to the wider Harrow Community.**

8 YOUTH SERVICES

8.1 *Findings*

- 8.1.1 As part of our methodology, we approached People First for information about Youth Services and were directed to the Transitions Group who gave us most of our evidence. Our findings and recommendations reflect the position we found.
- 8.1.2 The Council's Transitions Group is responsible for the delivery of youth services and aims to give special experiences to young people on occasions, valuing them and giving them a voice whilst maintaining behavioural boundaries, and enabling/empowering young people to carry their own messages to their communities. Other responsibilities of the Transitions Group include the Youth Offending Team, Connexions, Leaving Care, the Children's Fund and Play Schemes services.
- 8.1.3 There are challenges to balancing services for the more vulnerable young against the needs of the majority.
- 8.1.4 Hard data on the success and quality of youth engagement exercises is limited. Some 70,000 contacts are achieved from a budget of approximately £1.3m but the type, level and distribution of those individual contacts is apparently not known. Current provision would appear to focus on three groups: looked after children, those who come through the criminal justice system and mainstream young people accessed via schools.
- 8.1.5 There is a perception among some young people that youth services are only delivered to 'trouble makers' who come to the attention of the statutory sector.
- 8.1.6 Youth Services supported by Harrow Council would appear to be largely professionally delivered by Harrow staff although Children's Fund activities are mandatorily delivered through the voluntary sector and some voluntary groups are directly funded by Youth Services. Some other Local Authorities have chosen to work more closely with the voluntary and community sector.
- 8.1.7 The evidence that we heard from our expert, Patrick Lewis, and Youth Akili both showed us the potential for some statutory and outreach youth programmes to be effectively delivered by the voluntary/not for profit sector.
- 8.1.8 Youth Akili, a grassroots youth group, operates on a self-funded basis, with mentors organising a wide range of events/opportunities and providing individual support for their younger members. This work is being undertaken without recognition, support or reward.
- 8.1.9 There is evidence challenging the relevance of youth-centre or schools based youth work to a significant segment of young people. This is supported by our personal observations and experiences as Ward councillors and parents.
- 8.1.10 There are currently no dedicated outreach youth workers employed by the Council although the Connexions team does undertake some work on the street.

- 8.1.11 Our evidence also indicated that there is now an increased tendency for young people to mix across what were previously fairly tight age bands, so that young teenagers can now be found sharing the company of those in their late 20s and early 30s. Age no longer appears to be a defining factor of the cohort group, which now seems to be organised more on an 'interest base'.
- 8.1.12 There has been significant change in the way that Youth Services have developed over the last two years. There is an increasing recognition that the Council is not necessarily the most appropriate organisation to engage with some young people. Indeed there are many sectors of the community which the Council cannot reach.
- 8.1.13 The new Best Value Performance Indicators for the Youth Service from 2005/06 relate to the percentage of 13-19 year olds achieving accredited or recorded outcomes (based on active participants). The former relate to activities with a recognised external value (such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and First Aid Certification) whilst recorded outcomes relate to activities which are internally recognised.
- 8.1.14 'Resourcing Excellent Youth Services' introduced a set of 22 national standards against which services could be 'measured'. These include the expectation that 80% of youth service budgets should be spent on work with 13-19 year olds, targets for reaching 25% of 13-19 year olds and securing active participation by 15% of the same age group and a Youth Service budget based on £100/head of the 13-19 year old population.
- 8.1.15 There has been a very significant increase in Harrow's youth service budget over the last two years to its current value of £1.3m.
- 8.1.16 The national inspection programme only focuses on work with 13-19 year olds.
- 8.1.17 The Transitions group has services which cluster around the 10-17 year old age group but it also covers the 5-19 year old range. Connexions works with those up to 25 years old (if they have statements of special needs) whilst the Leaving Care team works with those up to 21 (and in some cases beyond).
- 8.1.18 The Youth Participation Strategy has recently been developed with input from some young people. Engagement with young people does, of course, also take place outside the Transitions Service, both in People First and Urban Living and there is good progress in working across service boundaries. Young people have, for example, been involved in recent consultations on sports leisure and arts issues and there have, in the past, been joint youth and social work projects.
- 8.1.19 Councillors have been engaging directly with young people, for example through the All Party Special Interest Group (APSIG).

8.2 Conclusions

- 8.2.1 We believe that the direction of travel of youth provision is right and have been encouraged by the cross-Directorate working that is increasingly taking place.
- 8.2.2 There is, however, currently a lack of transparency on the successes/failures of our youth programmes. Even the nature of the youth taking part in activities is unclear.
- 8.2.3 We are impressed by the good intentions and professionalism of the staff involved in delivering our youth programmes and believe that significant progress has been made in recent years towards developing a service which is both appropriate and responsive towards the needs of young people against a background of a changing social environment. We recognise, however, that change does take time and that further initiatives may well be forthcoming in the future.
- 8.2.4 We do not believe that the use of professional staff to deliver programs to mainstream youth always represents good use of our resources. We believe that such services could be delivered more efficiently through schools and voluntary and community organisations with suitable support from professional staff in child protection areas. In Harrow, partnership with the voluntary sector is being developed. The Local Area Agreement is largely based on partnership working.
- 8.2.5 We note that a high proportion of the youth budget is spent on youth centres to meet the needs of a relatively small number of young people. We remain unconvinced that this is an appropriate use of scarce resources. We consider that the multi-purpose use of such centres and/or the use of schools, children centres or other premises to deliver youth programs would allow more resource to be spent on youth staff.
- 8.2.6 We were very disappointed to note the current lack of dedicated outreach youth workers in Harrow although we note that some outreach work is being undertaken by the Connexions Team. We consider that it is vital that services are delivered to at-risk young people, particularly those 'on the street', before they enter the criminal justice system.
- 8.2.7 The perception among young people that services are only delivered to 'trouble makers' who come to the attention of the statutory sector needs to be corrected. We need to demonstrate that young people matter, that we need to deliver services to all Harrow's young people and that this might be best done by empowering the voluntary and community sector.
- 8.2.8 In Harrow, our youth services are currently organised on an age basis, generally serving those up to the age of 19 (beyond in some cases involving young people with special needs). Older youths can have a very significant influence on their younger companions, both positively and negatively. We recommend the Council should extend the target age group for which it provides outreach/criminal justice related services.

- 8.2.9 The current provision is partly driven by national performance indicators, which might explain the apparent emphasis on obtaining high numbers of contacts. Government inspections are heavily focussed on negative indicators. We do not believe this represents best value to either youth or the community. There is a need to find a balance to address the tension which exists between positive community engagement and meeting government targets. The Council does, of course, need to take into account the service framework set by the government and its inspection regime whilst also responding sensitively and appropriately to identified community needs. We suggest that a smarter approach to the way that the Council collects performance data, using all the permissible evidence available within Harrow, could go some way to helping resolve this challenge.
- 8.2.10 We endorse the evidence from our expert witness that the key resource of the Youth Service is its staff and that strong arguments exist to redirect funds away from the support of more traditional service delivery focussed on buildings (such as youth and community centres) towards the development of a stronger outreach service. We appreciate that outreach work on the streets is highly skilled, challenging and time consuming work whose outputs are difficult to quantify. We also appreciate that it often deals with client groups that may be older than the 'children' on whom the youth service is focused, as well as with other needs the youth service wish to prioritise. However, we can see no other method that addresses one of the principle areas of concern to the community: bored and apparently disaffected youth hanging around on street corners.
- 8.2.11 We believe that there is an assumption that statutory services must be delivered by professional staff. We challenge that view. We were highly impressed with the work undertaken by Youth Akili. The skills and commitment of the young mentors whom we met matched those of staff employed in youth services across the country. Their knowledge of the 'street' and the community they sought to serve – their community – far surpassed the professionals. The Council needs to move from being a 'policing organisation' with a culture of 'you can't do this because you are not qualified' to an enabling organisation which says 'we like what you are doing and can support you to do it better by...'
- 8.2.12 We would strongly support a fundamental review by the Council of the way that it provides services to our young people.
- 8.2.13 Engagement of the harder to reach young people out on the streets is more likely to be effective through the identification and use of connectors or common interests, such as music and sport, which make activities fun; the delivery of youth services by those on the same wavelength as the young people, particularly those out on the street; the willingness to invest considerable time in gaining the trust of the disaffected young people; and the exercise of considerable patience and acceptance of rebuffs before winning the trust and respect of the young. Such approaches are expensive whoever delivers them, but they are common within the voluntary sector. They are less commonly associated with the professional sector, who are forced to work within tighter constraints. Within the Council, the importance of continuing to strengthen cross boundary working cannot be over-emphasised.

- 8.2.14 Harrow has particular responsibility for those children who register on their 'radar' through being in local authority care, or 'at risk', or who come through the criminal justice system and it is essential that these services continue to be provided. We believe, however, that such responsibility need not be delivered exclusively by Harrow staff.
- 8.2.15 Further, there is a need to add value to the lives of other children in the borough, particularly those at risk of entering one of the categories for which the Council has a statutory responsibility. Not only does this benefit the child, it is also financially wise, since the cost of intervention once a statutory responsibility exists is considerable to the Council. Therefore it is important that the Council, in partnership with the Harrow Association of Voluntary Service (HAVS), faith groups and other community and voluntary organisations, map out current provision for such groups and work out ways in which the Council can add value to the work being done. Such support may be financial, by sector capacity building, incubating services for new start-up groups, or by directly taking responsibility for some statutory requirements for such groups. Both sectors are, after all, driven by the same objectives: to help our children 'be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well-being'.
- 8.2.16 Access to grant funding, which is dealt with later in this report, is also an issue which can impact upon voluntary youth work.
- 8.2.17 The recent initiatives to enable Councillors to engage directly with young people, including young people's presentation to Cabinet of the Youth Participation Strategy, confirm the positive direction in which the service is travelling.

8.3 *Recommendations relating to Youth Services*

- 13 The Council should develop a new framework for the commissioning of youth programmes based upon the following principles:**
- a. that services to mainstream youth are delivered by voluntary and community groups;**
 - b. that statutory services are delivered in tandem with voluntary and community groups;**
 - c. that professionals support voluntary and community groups by, for instance, assisting them to meet minimum child protection standards;**
 - d. that services are designed and delivered to address the needs of youth on the edge of statutory need: e.g. those that are at risk of presenting through the criminal justice system;**
 - e. that flexibility in the use of Borough assets encourages the Youth Service to refocus its resources away from Community Youth Centres,**

and toward joint working with schools, children centres and existing community assets and groups.

- 14 The High Performing Harrow Project should be used to develop effective local Performance Indicators for the Youth Service.**
- 15 The Council should extend the target age group for which it provides outreach/ criminal justice related services.**

9 RAYNERS LANE ESTATE AND TENANT PARTICIPATION

9.1 Findings

- 9.1.1 The Rayners Lane Estate (and some of its surrounding areas) is the most socially deprived area in the Borough by index of deprivation.
- 9.1.2 Significant Housing Department activity preceded the proposed transfer of properties on the Rayners Lane Estate to a housing association. An open and transparent process was adopted to address the prevailing resident cynicism, with all information being shared with residents on an equal basis. This process was heavily resource intensive.
- 9.1.3 The independent adviser selected by the residents to support them through the transfer process succeeded in developing their understanding and skills to enable them to engage effectively.
- 9.1.4 Following transfer of the properties to Warden Housing Association, the Council has largely withdrawn from working on the estate and some of the good work which had been undertaken has been lost. Residents now feel abandoned by the authority.
- 9.1.5 Warden Housing does not have the capacity or experience to duplicate Council expertise in community development. The previously strong Tenants' and Residents' Association has faded, despite strong empowerment objectives by both Warden and the Council. It is hard not to conclude that this is at least partly due to the dislocation caused by the handover of the Estate, and a lack of joint working between the two organisations.
- 9.1.6 Warden Housing Association has faced challenges and disappointments when trying to obtain Council services' support for some of its proposals.
- 9.1.7 There is a particular need for activities to engage with the older cohort of youth and with members of the Somali community.
- 9.1.8 The redevelopment of the Rayners Lane Estate offered significant opportunities for the provision of wider services in the South West of the Borough (for instance for sports and leisure facilities). The opportunity, until recently, appears to have been missed. This will affect the community outside the Rayners Lane Estate.
- 9.1.9 Warden Housing Association is developing a Neighbourhood Strategy and its seeking engagement with the Council and other partner bodies in taking this forward. The Council is now contributing significant capital toward a high quality sports and community centre on the Estate.
- 9.1.10 Tenants' and Residents' Associations on other Council estates and the Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations are currently supported by the Tenant Participation Officer. This post is proposed for deletion in the revised Urban Living Directorate structure.

9.2 Conclusions

- 9.2.1 The lead up to the proposed transfer of the properties on the Rayners Lane Estate involved the Housing Department in intensive activity which succeeded in re-gaining the trust of residents who, for historic reasons, had come to view the Council's intentions with cynicism. This development of trust appears to have been achieved through the adoption of an open and transparent process, including the sharing of all information with the community, the involvement of tenants in the decision making processes and the willingness of officers to try to action all community ideas, even if they were considered to be unlikely to succeed. Working together towards a common aim, good and regular communications with residents and special interest groups, special events and open days and, most importantly, the delivery of all promises were critical in achieving the shift from cynicism to active engagement. The employment of a skilled, and at times confrontational, independent adviser supported the empowerment and skilling of tenants to understand and effectively participate in the transfer process. The work undertaken on the estate illustrates well what can be achieved in effective tenant participation and the dedication and hard work of the Housing officers involved at the time must be highly commended.
- 9.2.2 Regrettably, we learnt that much of the good work undertaken on the estate has been dissipated since the housing transfer. The strong Tenants' and Residents' Association (TRA) which had been established has lost much of its impetus and there is a general feeling amongst residents that they have been abandoned by the Council. Whilst the terms of the transfer required Warden Housing Association to develop a Neighbourhood Strategy, too little account was given to the support that Warden would need to achieve this aim. Instead, the Council appears to have abdicated its responsibilities for its residents on this estate. This also impacts on the availability of services to those living in neighbouring areas.
- 9.2.3 The support provided to TRAs across the Council by the Tenant Participation Office can be highly effective, as demonstrated in relation to the Rayners Lane estate. We recognise that there are currently challenges around the representativeness of the HFTRA but do not believe that this will be helped by the proposed deletion of the post from the Urban Living Directorate structure. We feel that the Council should continue to provide, via Service Level Agreements and officer input, support for the formation, training and running of resident, and other voluntary, groups

9.3 Recommendations relating to Rayners Lane Estate and Tenant Participation

- 16. The Council should recognise that in transferring its housing properties to another social landlord, as has taken place on the Rayners Lane Estate, it still retains its other responsibilities to local residents. All services should, therefore, seek to work in partnership with any new landlord in identifying and addressing identified local needs.**

17. **High Performing Harrow should be used to develop, in conjunction with the Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations (HFTRA), local Performance Indicators to capture performance in relation to the functioning of Tenants' and Residents' Associations (TRA). To assist in this, the annual estate questionnaire should include a question on how well the relevant estate TRA is felt to represent each tenant.**

10 CULTURAL & STRUCTURAL CHANGE

10.1 Findings

- 10.1.1 We were told that community engagement is, currently, a demanding 'add on' to stretched officers' day jobs.
- 10.1.2 Community organisations, and indeed members of staff, told us that the re-structuring of the Council was not well understood and that it was difficult to identify the appropriate person/section to approach with a problem. Many members of the community do not understand the Council or the way that it works and have limited knowledge of its overall priorities.
- 10.1.3 There is an apparent 'credibility gap' between what the Council achieves and people's perceptions of this.
- 10.1.4 Residents value the benefits of area working but would like to see even less bureaucracy to achieve faster results.
- 10.1.5 Some of the public object to the use of 0845 telephone numbers as the area phone contact point and would also like to see a message leaving and call back system.
- 10.1.6 We heard from a community association which had established a good working relationship with public realm maintenance staff but found that this was broken by staff changes introduced to support the roll out of a further area. The association was not informed of the staff changes and issues were left unresolved for many months. Equally worryingly, an offer from the association to act as a conduit with local residents was not followed up.
- 10.1.7 Knowledge and experiences from engagement exercises are not shared across the Council.
- 10.1.8 The Council's regeneration unit has a slim structure.
- 10.1.9 The Council did not arrange any specific activities to mark Local Democracy Week 2005.

10.2 Conclusions

- 10.2.1 We agree that, generally, too many decisions are still taken at an unnecessarily high level and believe that more decision-making powers, together with associated accountabilities, should be devolved to officers at middle management level. In doing this, the Council must recognise that mistakes will be made and put in place mechanisms to learn from these.
- 10.2.2 First Contact and the final roll out of New Harrow should assist in addressing the community's continuing difficulties in understanding the re-structuring of the Council and contacting the right person.

- 10.2.3 Whilst some staff are well equipped in the new ways of working, if the Council genuinely wants to engage with its local communities, staff at all levels must be trained to recognise and respond positively to local input and offers of help.
- 10.2.4 We believe that the significant pace of change within the Council has contributed to the public's lack of understanding of the way that the Council works. The production of a simple booklet on the way that the Council works and a flow chart of how to engage with the Council would help fill some of this information gap. Marking the next Local Democracy Week could be another way in which the Council can seek to explain its workings and objectives to the public. Our view is that the Council also needs to continue to strengthen the emphasis placed on the importance of all its activities stemming from, and linking to, the Corporate Plan. A cultural shift of emphasis from projects being championed on an individual basis to a systemic approach is required. Service plans should include a section on community engagement, showing the plans, timescales and resources for community engagement activities, together with an assessment of the expected service delivery outcomes and the identified performance measures. They should be made available on the Internet.
- 10.2.5 The Chief Executive stated that the Council suffers from a 'credibility gap', defined as a belief by residents that the Council achieves less than it (measurably) does achieve. She stated that this was at least partly a by-product of a negative approach to local government by the national media. Her view was that this made the need to communicate effectively with the public (and to develop positive relationships with the local press) even more important.
- 10.2.6 Conversely, we believe the Council needs to recognise that it can bridge the credibility gap by putting community engagement at the heart of its work rather than see it as an add-on for which time and space must be found. There is a need for the Council to know its community so that its services and engagement are relevant. The Council needs to pool the knowledge and information it captures from various engagement exercises. For instance, one staff focus group suggested that the Council could learn much by analysing the nature and frequency of complaints as a means of highlighting a service need or focus. The advantage of this approach is that it would change public perception of the Council as a listening organisation which acts on what it hears.
- 10.2.7 In looking at the regeneration of Rayners Lane Estate and Wealdstone, we noted the slim structure of the Council's regeneration unit. We would, suggest that an informal network is created of officers with regeneration skills and experience who would be able to advise and support regeneration colleagues on a 'hothouse' basis. If successful, this model of an in-house organisational pool of knowledge and expertise could be extended to support other specialisms. The establishment of a process to capture information on staff expertise would assist in developing this pool of knowledge.
- 10.2.8 The area contact telephone numbers should be promoted further. Whilst this concept is good, we recommend that the use of 0845 telephone numbers should be reviewed. Many members of the public can make unlimited free local calls but are still charged for 0845 numbers. Members of the public have also

reported to us the long and frustrating telephone queues to reach a member of staff at the Public Realm Maintenance call centre. The introduction of a call back system to those leaving messages should be considered.

- 10.2.9 A new approach has been adopted for Harrow People which should help to promote engagement within the community. It is too early to evaluate the outcomes from this change but we commend this change in direction.

10.3 Recommendations relating to Cultural & Structural Change

- 18 Community engagement needs to be at the heart of the work the Council does and space and time must be found for it in the job descriptions and roles that officers play. This will allow the Council to join up its work and knowledge and achieve better efficiency and efficacy. It will also improve the perception of Harrow Council by the people it serves.**
- 19 Harrow People should be used to improve the public's knowledge about the way the Council operates and that this is supported by increased and innovative outreach work.**
- 20 The Council devises a programme of outreach activities for the next Local Democracy Week, focussed on helping the public to understand what the Council does and how it is run.**
- 21 A simple booklet or leaflet explaining the Council's structure and how it works would be useful for the public, officers and councillors. A flow chart of how to get things done would be appropriate, together with a 'how-to guide' of how to engage with the Council. Both First Contact and the Communications Unit should be involved in the production of these documents.**
- 22 An informal network should be created of staff with experience and knowledge of regeneration issues for use as an organisational 'hothouse' of expertise to support the regeneration unit as/when required. A system should be established to capture this information.**
- 23 All Service plans should include a section on community engagement, showing what are the service's plans, timescales and resources for community engagement, together with an assessment of the expected service delivery outcomes and performance measures.**
- 24 In the interests of transparency and to facilitate engagement, all Departmental service plans should be published on the Internet. The Internet and intranet should be delivered from a single common database. In the interests of transparency, all material on the intranet should be available on the Internet unless there is good reason to do otherwise.**

11 GRANT FUNDING

11.1 Findings

- 11.1.1 Youth Akili highlighted to us the difficulties those active in youth work on the streets, as well as other new/emerging voluntary groups, faced in accessing Council funding. Smaller grassroots organisations often do not have the structures which allow them to meet the stringent outcome delivery and monitoring which we require for accountability.
- 11.1.2 Some community groups have concerns that grant applications are not always judged against objective criteria and that there is a bias towards supporting applications from the large, well established voluntary organisations. A previous, more flexible process for providing small grants to new/emerging groups appears to have been discontinued.
- 11.1.3 The Grants Advisory Panel is to appoint a Voluntary Sector Advisor to improve the information and decision-making.
- 11.1.4 We learnt that Ealing Council views its grant budget as a key driver for community development and endorse its approach of viewing the support of infrastructure organisations as a form of investing to save. It has also adopted a system whereby its grants budget is delineated into discrete blocks of funding.

11.2 Conclusions

- 11.2.1 Our current grants procedure is based on a demanding application process which requires applicants to put in a significant amount of time and effort without any guarantee of success.
- 11.2.2 In addition, even where groups are able to provide well-written applications, it would seem that their applications are not always judged on objective criteria. There is a credibility gap between what the Council is seen to do and what it advertises which contributes to the lack of trust and conspires against community engagement.
- 11.2.3 The agreed appointment of a Voluntary Sector Advisor to the Grants Advisory Panel is a helpful development but does not remove the Council's responsibility to evolve a system which is fair and transparent and enables good work to proceed whilst accounting for Taxpayers' money.
- 11.2.4 We are aware that the largest proportion of Harrow's grant budget is awarded to the larger, well-established voluntary organisations. This is prima facie evidence that it is harder for new or emerging groups to demonstrate that they are equally deserving of financial support. We see Ealing's process of delineating its available grant monies into discrete funding blocks as one way of providing some support for our newer and smaller community groups.
- 11.2.5 We would also like to see instituted a pilot scheme of earmarked grants monies to support the work being done by frontline, grassroots organisations. Council

involvement should be in the form of creating the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for our audit trail while giving frontline organisations and youth mentors the support and accreditation they need to continue the valuable support they give Harrow young people. In developing this model, it should be clear that the idea is not to take over the network or client base or sideline those currently working on the frontline but to support them to deliver in a safe and sustainable manner whilst meeting our standards for the safety and care of young people, and accountability for monies spent. This should be incorporated in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) submission to the Government Office for London (GOL) as it offers the possibility of making sustainable, innovative change under the 'children and young people block' and the 'stronger communities block'.

- 11.2.6 We also recommend that a small 'Rewards for Achievement' funding pilot be established for the effective provision of services which have proved to be of value to the community. This approach would support smaller, emerging groups in securing recognition, and a financial reward, without their having to meet the rigorous demands associated with mainstream grant applications. The traditional onus on the Council to validate the legitimacy of the organisation and to ensure good and proper use of public funds prior to approving a grant application would be replaced by criteria based on community need and proven effectiveness in meeting those needs.
- 11.2.7 The Council should also consider adopting a system similar to that used in Ealing Council whereby there is some delineation of grant funding into discrete blocks.
- 11.2.8 We believe these approaches would help to address the difficulties faced by new organisations in accessing the grants system against the 'blocking' of funds by the competing demands of more established groups who have become dependent on Council funding, rather than viewing it as pump priming support. We recognise that it will not be possible to introduce new systems immediately since the grant allocation process for 2006/07 is already well underway. We would, however, hope that it would be possible to provide some early support for new and emerging groups as a first step in the change process, prior to undertaking a more comprehensive review in the new administration when the issue of awarding grants within discretely identified blocks can be addressed.

11.3 *Recommendations relating to Grant Funding*

- 25 A 'risk pot' of funding should be identified from the main Grants budget for use in supporting new and emerging community groups on the lines suggested above. This initiative should be incorporated into any LAA future submission to the GOL. The funds for this pilot should be separately identified from the main Grants budget.**
- 26 Consideration should be given to establishing a pilot scheme to provide funding for 'Rewards for Achievement' for work completed by frontline,**

grassroots organisations, based on past (unfunded) performance. This pilot should also be funded from the main Grants budget.

- 27 The Grants Advisory Panel should also consider dividing its available funds into discretely identified blocks.**

12 GOOD PRACTICE IN ENGAGEMENT

12.1 Findings

- 12.1.1 Community engagement is a specialist area of knowledge for which there are no right or wrong answers. Public bodies nationally are facing challenges in effective engagement. There are, however, many sources of information available on good practice techniques.
- 12.1.2 There has, until the recent appointment of the Community Engagement Policy Officer, been very limited corporate support for Directorates in planning and undertaking engagement activities.
- 12.1.3 The Council is currently developing its Community Engagement Strategy. The production of a good practice toolkit will support the strategy.

12.2 Conclusions

- 12.2.1 Our review has benefited from working in tandem with the development of the draft Community Engagement Strategy and the synergies arising from the two processes have been marked. Consequently, we are glad that our work has been able to influence the development of the strategy, which we note now incorporates many of our findings.
- 12.2.2 We see the development of the proposed toolkit of good engagement practices as an essential resource for staff and recommend that this is made available both on the intranet and, for the benefit of partner organisations, the internet.

12.3 Recommendation relating to Good Practice in Engagement

- 28 The proposed toolkit of good engagement practices should be made available on both the intranet and the Internet.**

13 ROLE OF COUNCILLORS

13.1 Findings

- 13.1.1 Our evidence gathering has involved direct contact with a cross section of staff, partner organisations, community groups, members of the public, as well as experts in the field of community engagement. During this review we have been impressed by the willingness of all concerned to share their experiences and view with us.
- 13.1.2 Members of Youth Akili had never before had contact with Councillors and told us that they had not thought that we would be like ordinary people who shared the same problems and concerns as themselves. More importantly, they told us that they would never have imagined that Councillors would ever really listen to them and that the exchange of information at our one meeting had empowered them in their mission.
- 13.1.3 Council staff that took part in our focus groups, similarly, spoke very positively of the opportunity to make their views and ideas known directly to Councillors.
- 13.1.4 The government's vision for the future of local government sees Ward Councillors filling an important local leadership role.

13.2 Conclusions

- 13.2.1 We were particularly pleased to learn that the Chief Executive shared our view that dialogue between Members (and senior officers) with more junior members of staff was an extremely powerful tool since we believe that there is a natural relationship between good management and effective community engagement, both of which require those in power (Councillors and senior management) to genuinely listen to those wielding less influence (staff and the public).
- 13.2.2 This opportunity to engage directly with members of the public and staff at this level is a unique and tremendous asset available to scrutiny Councillors and one which we are convinced is one of the real strengths of scrutiny.
- 13.2.3 Our work has led us to conclude that the role of Councillors is not well defined and that this role is evolving further in the light of the Government's vision for 'vibrant local leadership'. The Chief Executive identified, rightly in our view, that Councillors have a dual role of Community Advocacy and Community Leadership. It is important that Councillors are enabled to fulfil their role in the interests of community engagement and strengthened local democracy. In view of all the changes in the Council, it is important that the member development programme recognises the training needs of all Councillors. Given the forthcoming local government elections in 2006, we believe that the Council must start now to develop a programme to support new Councillors in particular in getting to grips with their role and responsibilities. We are interested in the idea of the Council adopting job descriptions for Ward Councillors, Portfolio Holders and those in leadership positions. The issue of Member roles is one that we believe should be incorporated into next year's scrutiny work

programme, when the question of Members' job descriptions can be considered in greater depth.

13.3 *Recommendations relating to Role of Councillors*

29 A member development programme providing guidance on the role and responsibilities of Ward Councillors, particularly in the context of the Government's vibrant local leadership agenda, should be developed in time for the new Councillor intake after the 2006 elections.

APPENDIX 1

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CMT	Corporate Management Team
CPA	Corporate Performance Assessment (the way that the Government assesses the performance of every local authority in the country)
CPZ	Controlled Parking Zone
GOL	Government Office for London (the regional government office for the capital)
HAVS	Harrow Association of Voluntary Service
HCRE	Harrow Council for Racial Equality
HFTRA	Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations
KLOE	Key Lines of Enquiry (which are to be measured in the new Corporate Performance Assessment process)
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LDF	Local Development Framework (the newly introduced national process for planning for physical developments)
NWW	New Ways of Working
ODPM	Office of the deputy Prime Minister
SCI	Statement of Community Involvement (required to be produced under the LDF – sets out the standards to be achieved and the approaches to be applied)
TfL	Traffic for London
TRA	Tenants' and Residents' Association
VFM	Value for Money

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We would also like to thank Councillor Phil O'Dell, the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Issues, for taking the time to share his experiences and knowledge with us and the staff of the traffic and transportation section for providing us with the background information we needed, guiding us through their existing processes and working constructively with us to identify good practices which the Council could use across the board to improve the way that it engages with local people.

Thanks are also due to the staff in the scrutiny unit who have supported our efforts.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Traffic issues are clearly amongst those which most affect local people, as demonstrated by the focus of much of the general public response to the Hear/Say review as a whole, whether received by letter, email or through the experimental message board. They can and do, therefore, generate strong feelings within local communities, with many initiatives being led by public demand. The findings of our study, however, have a number of parallels to those of the social inclusion case study and the main review and we believe will provide some general learning points which can be applied across the Council as a whole.
- 2.2 Some residents have clearly been left feeling frustrated and disempowered by their perceived inability to secure what they see as a satisfactory outcome to issues raised. We recognise that there is almost inevitably a need to balance conflicting wishes in any situation which might lead to change but believe that addressing some of the underlying issues associated with this dissatisfaction would help to restore the community's trust in the Council. The key issues that we have identified are:
- Transparency of processes
 - Listening to and valuing the community
 - Communications
 - Joined up working
- 2.3 These are discussed in more detail below, as well as being referred to in the main report.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

TRANSPARENT PROCESSES

1 To ensure total credibility and exposure, all consultation material:

- a) **must include a positive statement as to the considerations and reasoning behind the “proposal”. It should also set out substantiated positives and negatives for any “proposal” and show that the local needs are understood;**
- b) **must be delivered to ALL affected households, including flats where some people can be “left out”, and everyone on the electoral register urged to respond, thus minimising the risk of people being excluded from the process. The criteria adopted for determining which households are affected by a proposed scheme, either because of their geographical location or by being within the area of impact, should be published. We do not believe that the separate delivery of a consultation document to every individual on the electoral register would be an effective use of public monies;**
- c) **should state the purpose of the consultation, what outcomes could arise, and aspects of the “proposal” that can/cannot be influenced by responses to the consultation;**
- d) **should also clearly state whether the “proposal” is Mandated on the Council (and by whom), Advisory (and by whom) or of the Council’s own volition;**
- e) **should show local data that justifies the “proposal” in a straightforward manner.**
- f) **should exclude significant reference to National data as this can make the “proposal” seem remote and dissuade response since it can cause the “proposal” to be viewed as likely to be implemented regardless of the responses to the consultation exercise;**
- g) **should give a balanced assessment of the ‘pros and cons’ of the proposals;**
- h) **should be open and effectively communicate the true options where the public can influence a “proposal”.**

2 To provide transparency:

- a) **an analysis of the impact of traffic proposals should be made available from the outset. At the initial phase of any “proposal”, the project leader should document and make public the data that gave rise to the “proposal” and the justification for its promotion;**

- b) the public should be made aware of how the engagement exercise is to be undertaken, including the decisions to be made at each stage of the exercise, the process/criteria for selecting particular options and the sorts of considerations which might give rise to changes to the proposals;
- c) the public should be informed where proposals emanate from and who makes the final decision;
- d) schemes should be reviewed post implementation and the results made available to the public;
- e) the Council should (with the exception of safety schemes) aim to undertake reviews after no more than 12 months post “Implementation” of a scheme and consideration should be given to earmarking some resources to address any identified issues/problems. If resources do not exist to undertake the review until year 3 or 4, the project leader should at least document in a short report their commentary and any user feedback for future analysis. Due to their different nature, safety schemes should continue to be reviewed after three years unless there are exceptional circumstances.

LISTENING TO AND VALUING THE COMMUNITY

- 3. Staff should be trained to demonstrate the value placed on all public input, including the more difficult instances which may “only affect a few”, by responding in user friendly and constructive ways. Individuals often share their good, and bad, experiences amongst their own wide circle of contacts.
- 4. The public must be kept informed of the outcome of engagement/consultation exercises by:
 - a) placing in the public domain findings resulting from “information” gathering and consultations and the progress of scheme development;
 - b) making use of all physical and technological means to reach as many sectors of the public as possible, including community notice boards, local libraries and other information points, and any neighbourhood communications arena opportunities offered by the area structure;
 - c) providing all who respond to a consultation with updates and feedback at appropriate times. For major exercises, where levels of response are expected to be high, the Council’s website should be used. In this case, it is essential to inform respondents of the timescale for posting the feedback/updates and, mindful of the digital divide, to invite individuals without IT skills/facilities to request the posted information in alternative formats;
 - d) indicating how a decision was made when no clear mandate was received or the decision made was contrary to the mandate.

COMMUNICATIONS

- 5 A two-stage information and consultation process should be adopted which:
- a) involves people early and not just the large groups;
 - b) uses existing and new publicity approaches e.g. Harrow People and 'New Harrow Project' Area Services and the Council's website, to advise the community of emerging issues that either the Council or the Council together with the Community consider could do with some attention;
 - c) ensures full consultation which then references the initial publicity, reports on how the "proposal" was developed and what the key issues were from which the plans now published were formulated.
- 6 The actual and apparent image of Community contact should be improved by:
- a) creating regular consultative forums;
 - b) establishing First Contact knowledgeable enquiry and information points. The development of responses, based on individual services' input, to some Frequently Asked Question would assist staff to respond to all forms of incoming enquiry and referrals;
 - c) providing documentation that has the right balance between detail and being too shallow/full;
 - d) considering the use of more graphical and pictorial representation in consultation material and the provision of minion service, both of which should increase the number of people who can access and respond to the presented information;
 - e) implementing the message board facility on a permanent basis;
 - f) centralising the production, and even processing, of consultation material and associated publicity using information and detail from the service area. Directorates **MUST** give final clearance to all documents to ensure the right message is being conveyed. If central resourcing is not practical, Directorates should consider securing the services of a dedicated communications officer;
 - g) avoiding all documents having an almost identical look and presentation, which could lead to public confusion.

JOINED UP WORKING

7. To avoid apparent silo working and encourage a joined up approach, we recommend:

- a) **establishing a publicly available combined schedule of consultations and plans from all Directorates;**
 - b) **ensuring that issues and “proposals” raised within one Directorate or consultation that reference or impact another are adequately reviewed so that the outcome enables all the benefits achievable from the linkage to be derived for the good of the community. This may mean some schemes are delayed slightly while the other issues or funds etc are channelled to maximise those benefits and long term savings created by dealing with them in isolation or at different times,**
 - c) **watching and catering for issues that arise as consequential impact and avoiding ripple effects on neighbouring areas or groups of people;**
 - d) **ensuring that any consultancy appointed to carry out consultation on behalf of the Council is made aware of all the history that led to the “proposal” AND any plans from other Directorates that could have or be perceived to have an impact on the “proposal” under review. Consultants’ work must be checked for accuracy by the commissioning service and possibly also by area management;**
 - e) **making use of the various feedback mechanisms emerging with the roll out of both the Area Managers and Area Champions.**
- 8 To support more effective use of Transport for London (TfL) funding arrangements, we recommend that:**
- a) **Cabinet raises with TfL the challenges of the current funding arrangements and seeks the full removal of the year end barrier on spend, which causes unnecessary pressure on timescales, often limiting consultation times and inducing non priority year end spend;**
 - b) **processes are established to strengthen good housekeeping and progress reporting to minimise the impact of the current annual funding arrangement and to have alternative schemes for use ready in the pipeline should the barrier not be moved in the short term.**

4 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 Evidence for this case study was largely gathered through sample surveys of respondents to the initial Council consultations on the Cedars 20 mph zone, the Earlsmead Safer Routes to Schools Schemes and the Stanmore Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) review. Our survey aimed to find out whether people understood the original consultation documents, whether they felt that they had been given enough information, whether the decision making process had been adequately explained and whether enough time had been given for response. The survey also explored the issue of the feedback provided on the result of the consultations, people's preferred methods of consultation, the ways that the Council could improve the way it involved people on traffic issues, whether discussion of traffic issues had ever been initiated with the Council and the quality of responses received, and the sorts of traffic issues on which people would like a greater say. A copy of the questionnaire is attached at Appendix A to this case study. (Identical questions were used in the Cedars and Earlsmead surveys.)
- 4.2 In total we received 10 responses to the 61 people we contacted on our Cedars questionnaire, 10 (out of 37) responses to our Earlsmead questionnaire, and 71 (out of 300) responses on our Stanmore survey. Whilst the response rate to the Cedars questionnaires was low, there was a good response rate to the Earlsmead and Stanmore questionnaires. The covering letter accompanying our surveys made it clear that our survey was not intended to evaluate the merits of the particular schemes and would not lead to the decisions taken being revisited. Given the fact that respondents would not, therefore, directly benefit from inputting into our review, we were particularly pleased that so many people had decided to get involved with the case study. Making contact with the unengaged has, however, proved one of our greatest challenges, which we sought to address through telephone contacts.
- 4.3 Our work also took into account issues that we knew were arising/had arisen in other recent traffic consultations. We revisited the review on traffic consultations undertaken by the Environmental and Economy Scrutiny Sub-Committee in 2003 and drew on our knowledge of issues that had been raised at relevant Call-In Sub-Committee meetings.
- 4.4 The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Issues and the staff of the Council's traffic and transportation section have also input to our deliberations.

5 KEY FINDINGS

- 5.1 Currently, the traffic and transportation section adopts a two-stage approach to developing traffic schemes (other than those affecting controlled parking zones (CPZ) which are subject to certain statutory requirements). This involves firstly, identifying options and/or an optimum scheme, when key stakeholders are involved in preliminary discussions as appropriate, leading to the preparation of draft documents before going out to consultation with the general public. Results are then analysed and posted on the website, the proposed design reviewed and amended in the light of the consultation results and referred to the Traffic and Road Safety Advisory Panel and/or the Portfolio Holder for decision. If the scheme proceeds to implementation, the design is finalised, works procured and frontagers notified of the proposed works. Feedback on the results of the consultation and decision making process is currently undertaken at this stage; currently feedback is undertaken on an ad-hoc basis although it is intended to improve this process. Post-implementation, customer feedback is obtained from frontagers on the management of the works although it is intended to extend this to include the scheme design.
- 5.2 Our surveys of respondents to the three implemented traffic schemes showed that most people felt that the information which they had received was easy to understand and that enough time had been allowed for response. A smaller number of people, although still the majority of respondents, felt that enough information on the proposed scheme had been given and the consultation process had explained the decision-making process.
- 5.3 Overall, the majority of respondents indicated that they had not been informed about the results of the consultation, with the vast majority of respondents to the Stanmore CPZ scheme indicating that they had not received any feedback at all. There was, however a much more balanced response from the respondents to the Cedars and Earlsmead schemes, with almost equal numbers reporting receipt and non-receipt of feedback.
- 5.4 The preferred method of consultation was clearly by post, a means which was felt to reach all residents. None of the alternative means of contact, such as email, printed leaflets/through Harrow People, face-to face visits or meetings, phone or questionnaires, received any significant level of support. Interestingly, some of the small number of those who had not responded to the original traffic questionnaire but whom we ourselves contacted by telephone, appreciated being contacted in this way.
- 5.5 We also asked whether people had ever raised traffic issues themselves with the Council and their satisfaction with the response received, the intention being to gauge how the two way engagement process with the Council operated. Just over 40% of respondents indicated that they had indeed initiated such dialogue. Virtually all these respondents were from those consulted on the Stanmore scheme although we do not have sufficient information to determine what, or when, issues had been raised. Of this group some 75% indicated that they were not happy with the response received. Notably, 33% people indicated that they had either received no/ a poor response to their communication. (There was an equal balance of satisfied and dissatisfied people amongst the very small

numbers from the Cedars and Earlsmead respondents who had initiated discussions with the Council on traffic issues).

- 5.6 Other public input into the case study has highlighted the importance of a range of general issues, including involving all interested stakeholders (including Ward Councillors and local Residents' Associations) at the initial planning stage for any proposal; ensuring all households received a copy the consultation document; publicising all relevant data justifying the proposal; factual accuracy of all information released; and clearly presenting all the facts and likely implications of the proposal. Other issues highlighted as being important were the clear and legible presentation of information, the neutral phrasing of questions in surveys, the effective use of exhibitions and public meetings, the provision of adequate time for responses, and the provision of feedback on the full results of the exercise.
- 5.7 Some correspondents gave us examples of long standing issues which they had raised with the Council and had felt had either not been progressed or not even acknowledged. We have referred this correspondence to the Traffic and Transportation Section.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 **TRANSPARENT PROCESSES**

- 6.1.1 We believe that the purpose of any engagement exercise should be set out clearly and honestly from the outset, together with the reasoning behind the proposal, the existing local data available to support it, an indication of what is/ is not included within the consultation, and both the positive and negative outcomes associated with any available options.
- 6.1.2 It is also essential for the public to know how and when decisions are to be taken and who is responsible for them. When the decision rests with other bodies, such as Transport for London (TfL) or the local bus company, the limits of the Council's power must be made clear since the public tends to see the Council as the ultimate local decision maker. However, even if the Council itself does not hold any power, it nevertheless still has both a 'well-being' responsibility to, and a local leadership role for, its residents. It can, and should where appropriate, represent residents' views to partner bodies and external agencies and seek to secure a due process that fairly takes into account all representations made prior to any decision being taken.
- 6.1.3 Residents have told us that their preferred way of communication is by letter/post (and this was confirmed by the work undertaken by the social inclusion case study group at the Rayners Lane Fun Day). Consultation material must, therefore, be delivered, by whatever means, to every single household affected by the proposal. We do not suggest, however, that this is the only means of engaging with the community on any individual proposed scheme and believe that it is essential to put in a place a variety of approaches to seek the views of greatest number of the target population. (see also section below on Communications)
- 6.1.4 We recognise that interests in traffic schemes can extend beyond the pure geographical location of dwellings and that this can be a difficult professional judgement. We suggest that publishing the criteria identified in reaching decisions on whom to consult will go some way to earning the essential public trust in the Council's processes. It will also facilitate the identification and subsequent addressing of any inadvertent omissions.

6.1.5 **Recommendations**

- 1 To ensure total credibility and exposure, all consultation material:**
- a) must include a positive statement as to the considerations and reasoning behind the "proposal". It should also set out substantiated positives and negatives for any "proposal" and show that the local needs are understood;**
 - b) must be delivered to ALL affected households, including flats where some people can be "left out", and everyone on the electoral register urged to respond, thus minimising the risk of people being excluded**

from the process. The criteria for determining which households are affected by a proposed scheme, either because of their geographical location or by being within the area of impact, should be published. We do not believe that the delivery of a separate consultation document to every individual on the electoral register would be an effective use of public monies;

- c) should state the purpose of the consultation, what outcomes could arise, and aspects of the “proposal” that can/cannot be influenced by responses to the consultation;
- d) should also clearly state whether the “proposal” is Mandated on the Council (and by whom), Advisory (and by whom) or of the Council’s own volition;
- e) Should show local data that justifies the “proposal” in a straightforward manner;
- f) Should exclude significant reference to National data as this can make the “proposal” seem remote and dissuade response since it can cause the “proposal” to be viewed as likely to be implemented regardless of the responses to the consultation exercise;
- g) Should give a balanced assessment of the ‘pros and cons’ of the proposals;
- h) Should be open and effectively communicate the true options where the public can influence a “proposal”.

2 To provide transparency:

- a) An analysis of the impact of traffic proposals should be made available from the outset. At the initial phase of any “proposal”, the project leader should document and make public the data that gave rise to the “proposal” and the justification for its promotion;
- b) the public should be made aware of how the engagement exercise is to be undertaken, including the decisions to be made at each stage of the exercise, the process/criteria for selecting particular options and the sorts of considerations which might give rise to changes to the proposals;
- c) the public should be informed where proposals emanate from and who makes the final decision;
- d) schemes should be reviewed post implementation and the results made available to the public;
- e) the Council should (with the exception of safety schemes) aim to undertake reviews after no more than 12 months post “Implementation” of a scheme and consideration should be given to earmarking some

resources to address any identified issues/problems. If resources do not exist to undertake the review until year 3 or 4, the project leader should at least document in a short report their commentary and any user feedback for future analysis. Due to their different nature, safety schemes should continue to be reviewed after three years unless there are exceptional circumstances.

6.2 LISTENING TO AND VALUING THE COMMUNITY

- 6.2.1 Comments from the respondents to our surveys told us that some people do not believe that the Council is really listening to, taking notice of, and acting on what they say. The importance of listening to, valuing and respecting community input must be recognised and embedded into the organisational culture if the Council is to be effective in engaging its communities. The alternative is to risk an increase in the public's distrust of the Council and its motives, thereby heightening public disaffection and disinterest. We believe that the community's experiences of engagement with the Council in one situation can impact, both positively and negatively, on other services. As the community does not see each service as being discrete but simply as being 'the Council', it is paramount that organisational culture is addressed Council-wide.
- 6.2.2 One of the cornerstones to demonstrating the Council's genuine intent to listen to and take into account the community's views is to ensure that high quality, comprehensive and timely feedback is provided. Traffic and transportation officers have told us that feedback on consultation and decision-making is an area on which they are keen to improve whilst the Portfolio Holder indicated his hope that the current restructuring of the Urban Living Directorate would provide the professional officers with some administrative support to achieve this aim. Furthermore, we have seen that area working in relation to public realm maintenance has facilitated and strengthened the public/Council interface and are optimistic that this improvement will be extended to traffic issues under the new structure.
- 6.2.3 We heard from staff at our focus groups that providing feedback is often an issue Council-wide and cannot over-emphasise the importance of this to the public. Unless the provision of feedback is embedded into the Council's culture as part and parcel of any engagement exercise, the Council will not earn the community's trust. Major schemes, of whatever discipline, often take many months to reach fruition, during which time the public hears nothing further and feels its views have been ignored. Continuing communication, whether through local area newsletters, 'Harrow People' or some other means, is essential, even if it is only to let people know that deliberations are still underway.
- 6.2.4 We also wish to draw attention to the invaluable role which members of staff play when dealing with individual queries or issues raised by members of the public. All frontline members of staff need effective communications skills. They should also be sufficiently aware of the 'wider picture' across the Council so that they can refer queries onto the relevant person when required; this joined up approach is, of course, one of the strengths of area working. We anticipate that the progression

of First Contact would further help in demonstrating the value which the Council accords its community.

6.2.5 Councillors, as well as staff, have an important role to play in keeping the public informed of progress and the outcome of consultations. As local leaders they can influence the processes which are put in place and press for an honest and open approach both in planning engagement activities and ensuring good ongoing communications following consultations and decision making.

6.2.6 Some members of the public appear to have limited knowledge of the Council's decision-making processes and the respective roles and responsibilities of officers and Councillors. Clarity about the results of consultation exercises and the reasons for taking each decision would go some way to letting people know that their views had been taken into account, even if they did not, in the end, secure the hoped for outcome. People would at least be able to see and assess all the evidence themselves, which should increase community understanding of the difficult decisions that the Council sometimes faces.

6.2.7 Recommendations

- 3. Staff should be trained to demonstrate the value placed on all public input, including the more difficult instances which may “only affect a few”, by responding in user friendly and constructive ways. Individuals often share their good, and bad, experiences amongst their own wide circle of contacts.**
- 4. The public must be kept informed of the outcome of engagement/consultation exercises by:**
 - a) placing in the public domain findings resulting from “information” gathering and consultations and the progress of scheme development;**
 - b) making use of all physical and technological means to reach as many sectors of the public as possible, including community notice boards, local libraries and other information points, and any neighbourhood communications arena opportunities offered by the area structure;**
 - c) providing all who respond to a consultation with updates and feedback at appropriate times. For major exercises, where levels of response are expected to be high, the Council's website should be used. In this case, it is essential to inform respondents of the timescale for posting the feedback/updates and, mindful of the digital divide, to invite individuals without IT skills/facilities to request the posted information in alternative formats;**
 - d) indicating how a decision was made when no clear mandate was received or the decision made was contrary to the mandate.**

6.3 COMMUNICATIONS

- 6.3.1 We believe that developing and maintaining good communication channels is central to effective community engagement and that the lessons from our study could well be applied to other parts of the Council.
- 6.3.2 Our study showed that traffic surveys are generally well understood, provide sufficient information, explain the decision making process and allow enough time for people to respond. We feel, however, that there are opportunities to increase the level of community engagement by strengthening the current consultation process. As indicated above, there are already plans to improve the current ad-hoc approach to feeding back consultation results. We would like to see this complemented by increased efforts to involve a wider cross-section of people at the early stages of the process, supported by an increase in the efforts to publicise new and emerging issues for both the Council and the community.
- 6.3.3 We heard from Ealing Council that their area forum structure is highly effective in engaging the community on local issues and believe that traffic proposals are one example where they would be particularly valuable. Area structures are, of course, also used effectively in a number of other authorities across the country and fit well with the Government's emphasis on neighbourhood working. The Chief Executive suggested to us that the embedding of area working within the Council's structure has provided a framework which could allow the consideration of local agenda issues at this more relevant level. The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport also highlighted the potential of using local area forums for effective community engagement. We believe that the creation of some form of area forum, whether purely on a consultative basis or with limited delegated powers and a modest budget for environmental improvements, is now the right way forward for this Council.
- 6.3.4 We are aware that there are different approaches across the Council to responding to individual queries/public contacts and heard from community members in the focus group that there is confusion as to how to contact some service points. As already stated, we feel that the implementation of Harrow's First Contact initiative should result in a significant improvement in the way that the Council deals with these enquiries.
- 6.3.5 We also believe that much can be achieved by the ensuring that our written communications are professionally produced and well written in plain English, achieve the right balance between providing adequate details and information scarcity/overload, and do not all have an almost identical look. We observed a recent tendency towards the latter approach, which we believe could lead to public confusion.
- 6.3.6 We would stress, however, the need to support written consultative material with alternative approaches, as appropriate, to facilitate engagement by the key target groups. Voluntary groups working with some specific sectors of the community have indicated their willingness to support the Council in reaching out to their members, whether through more accessible consultation documents or by other means. We believe that such offers of assistance should be promoted across the

Council and seriously considered by all those involved in planning any engagement activities. The Hear/Say experimental message board provided the community with a further means of inputting into this review. Whilst its use was limited in its very brief life, we note that there has been a very significant increase in correspondence to the scrutiny email address and believe that the adoption of a permanent message board will provide a valid alternative means of engagement for certain sectors of the community.

6.3.7 Recommendations

- 5 A two-stage information and consultation process should be adopted which:**
 - a) involves people early and not just the large groups;**
 - b) uses existing and new publicity approaches e.g. Harrow People and 'New Harrow Project' Area Services and the Council's website, to advise the community of emerging issues that either the Council or the Council together with the Community consider could do with some attention;**
 - c) ensures full consultation which then references the initial publicity, reports on how the "proposal" was developed and what the key issues were from which the plans now published were formulated.**

- 6 The actual and apparent image of Community contact should be improved by:**
 - a) creating regular consultative forums;**
 - b) establishing First Contact knowledgeable enquiry and information points. The development of responses, based on individual services' input, to some Frequently Asked Question would assist staff to respond to all forms of incoming enquiry and referrals;**
 - c) providing documentation that has the right balance between detail and being too shallow/full;**
 - d) considering the use of more graphical and pictorial representation in consultation material and the provision of minicom service, both of which should increase the number of people who can access and respond to the presented information;**
 - e) implementing the message board facility on a permanent basis;**
 - f) centralising the production, and even processing, of consultation material and associated publicity using information and detail from the service area. Directorates MUST give final clearance to all documents to ensure the right message is being conveyed. If central resourcing is not**

practical, Directorates should consider securing the services of a dedicated communications officer;

g) avoiding all documents having an almost identical look and presentation, which could lead to public confusion.

6.4 JOINED UP WORKING

- 6.4.1 Scrutiny's Council-wide audit of planned engagement activities undertaken at the start of the main review showed that a high level of community engagement activities was scheduled to take place over the year. Evidence from staff at the focus groups indicated that many staff were often unaware of the work underway in other parts of the Council. Our case study has highlighted some examples of this apparent silo working having a negative impact on holistic outcomes of new initiatives, such as the recent fragmentary approach in Stanmore to the parking problems in the area, the use of Sainsbury's monies and the Lidl car park project. There is, therefore, still some way to go in improving the Council's joined up working.
- 6.4.2 The issue of joined up working applies equally to the Council's relationship with appointed consultants and external agencies. An instance of a consultant appointed to develop a particular scheme for the Council producing literature containing some factual discrepancies was drawn to our attention and we are also aware of an example where a consultant appeared not to be fully conversant with the history that led to the proposal. We have received evidence of another example of a lack of joined up working in relation to the location of a bus stop, an activity which falls outside of the Council's responsibilities and on which there is no statutory requirement to consult. Local Councillors can, nevertheless, be a point of contact for the community to voice its concerns in such instances and may, where appropriate, facilitate dialogue between the community and the decision makers as part of their local leadership roles.
- 6.4.3 We are aware that much of the work of the traffic and transportation section is dependent upon funding provided by Transport for London (TfL), with whom we understand that the Council has a good working relationship. We are, nevertheless, of the opinion that the current funding process, which is based upon an annual funding award, sometimes lead to unnecessary timescale pressures, which can then impact on consultation proposals. We feel that a revised, more flexible funding arrangement would support more effective engagement processes as well as improved planning. We note that the Local Implementation Plan is already based on a three-year timeframe and would like to see a similar medium-term approach being adopted by TfL towards funding. During our discussions, the Portfolio Holder suggested that we also examine the way the Council engages with the community on planning issues. This is beyond the scope of this particular study and, regrettably, resources do not allow its inclusion at this stage. We would, however, suggest that the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Sub-Committee consider engagement on planning issues as a potential review topic for inclusion in its annual work programme at some time in the future.

6.4.4 Recommendations

- 7. To avoid apparent silo working and encourage a joined up approach, we recommend:**
 - a) establishing a publicly available combined schedule of consultations and plans from all Directorates;**
 - b) ensuring that issues and “proposals” raised within one Directorate or consultation that reference or impact another are adequately reviewed so that the outcome enables all the benefits achievable from the linkage to be derived for the good of the community. This may mean some schemes are delayed slightly while the other issues or funds etc are channelled to maximise those benefits and long term savings created by dealing with them in isolation or at different times,**
 - c) watching and catering for issues that arise as consequential impact and avoiding ripple effects on neighbouring areas or groups of people;**
 - d) ensuring that any consultancy appointed to carry out consultation on behalf of the Council is made aware of all the history that led to the “proposal” AND any plans from other Directorates that could have or be perceived to have an impact on the “proposal” under review. Consultants’ work must be checked for accuracy by the commissioning service and possibly also by area management;**
 - e) making use of the various feedback mechanisms emerging with the roll out of both the Area Managers and Area Champions.**

- 8 To support more effective use of Transport for London (TfL) funding arrangements, we recommend that:**
 - a) Cabinet raises with TfL the challenges of the current funding arrangements and seeks the full removal of the year end barrier on spend, which causes unnecessary pressure on timescales, often limiting consultation times and inducing non priority year end spend;**
 - b) processes are established to strengthen good housekeeping and progress reporting to minimise the impact of the current annual funding arrangement and to have alternative schemes for use ready in the pipeline should the barrier not be moved in the short term.**

6.5 RESOURCES

- 6.5.1** We recognise that our recommendations will have resource implications for the Traffic and Transportation Section, particularly in relation to feeding back results of consultations, carrying out reviews of schemes and publishing results. We believe that, in putting forward good practice recommendations, they will also have Council-wide implications. Our main report discusses this issue in greater detail.

Appendix A – Case study questionnaire on Stanmore CPZ



Hear/Say
Making a difference
through listening and talking

Harrow Council is looking at ways of encouraging greater public involvement in how the Borough is run through a review by its Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee has adopted a review group, jointly led by Julia Smith, Chief Executive of HAVs and Councillor Jean Lammiman, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The traffic and transport case study is being led by Roger Smith a representative of the community and Councillor John Nickolay.

An important part of the review is gauging your reaction to how well you feel you have been involved in traffic initiatives in your local area. **You have been consulted on the Stanmore Controlled Parking Zone Scheme.**

Your comments will help us identify existing strengths and weaknesses in our consultation processes, which will then be considered as recommendations for improvement.

We would appreciate you completing the questionnaire on Page Two telling us how well you feel about the way that we involve you on traffic issues.

You can respond by post with the attached pre-paid envelope, email scrutiny@harrow.gov.uk Or call us direct on 0208 420 9389.

The closing date for receiving the completed questionnaires is 15th August 2005.

We expect our review to be completed early in 2006.

Whilst the Overview Scrutiny Committee does not have the power to change the Council's processes, your views will be taken into account in the report produced, which will be considered by the Cabinet.

We will then inform all who reply of our findings and put the full report on the Council's internet site and also in the local libraries.

If you have any queries or would like to discuss any issues that concern you in more detail, please call Ekus Bosteng or Frances Hawkins on 0208 420 9389 or 0208 420 9202

The Council will be grateful for your views.

Yours sincerely
Roger Smith and Cllr John Nickolay



Questionnaire: Consultation on Stanmore Controlled Parking Scheme 2005

Name: _____

Address: _____

Was the information you received easy to understand? Comments Yes No

Were you given enough information? Comments Yes No

Was the decision making process explained? Comments Yes No

Were you given enough time to respond? Comments Yes No

Were you informed about the results of the consultation? Comments Yes No

How would you prefer to be consulted? Comments _____

Have you ever raised any traffic issues yourself with the Council? Comments Yes No

If so, were you happy with the response?
Please comment on the way your issue was handled Yes No

How can we improve the way we involve you on traffic issues? Comments _____

Are there any sorts of traffic issues you have never been consulted upon yet you feel as a local resident you should be?
Comments _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Please return it in the attached pre-paid envelope to Ekus Boateng, Scrutiny Unit, PO Box 57, Civic Centre, Station Road, Aarow, HA1 2ZF

APPENDIX B

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CMT	Corporate Management Team
CPA	Corporate Performance Assessment (the way that the Government assesses the performance of every local authority in the country)
CPZ	Controlled Parking Zone
GOL	Government Office for London (the regional government office for the capital)
HAVS	Harrow Association of Voluntary Service
HCRE	Harrow Council for Racial Equality
HFTRA	Harrow Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations
KLOE	Key Lines of Enquiry (which are to be measured in the new Corporate Performance Assessment process)
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LDF	Local Development Framework (the newly introduced national process for planning for physical developments)
NWW	New Ways of Working
ODPM	Office of the deputy Prime Minister
SCI	Statement of Community Involvement (required to be produced under the LDF – sets out the standards to be achieved and the approaches to be applied)
TfL	Traffic for London
TRA	Tenants' and Residents' Association
VFM	Value for Money



Scrutiny

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working with local people to improve services



To contact Scrutiny:

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PO Box 57, Civic Centre, Harrow HA1 2XF

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