

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIVE FORUM

28 SEPTEMBER 2005

Chair: * Councillor Nana Asante

Councillors: * Arnold * Currie
* Burchell (3) * Gate (2)
* Janet Cowan * Anjana Patel

* Denotes Member present
(2) and (3) Denote categories of Reserve Members

[NB Attendance at this meeting by representatives of community organisations and representatives of the Local Authority is recorded at Appendix 1].

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**162. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:-

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor Lavingia	Councillor Gate
Councillor Dharmarajah	Councillor Burchell

163. **Declarations of Interest:**

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
Councillor Nana Asante	Member of the African SANG and The A-Connexion's Global Village, which in turn was a member of Harrow Association of Voluntary Services (HAVS)
Councillor Gate	Member of St Peter's Church, West Harrow
Councillor Anjana Patel	Harrow Mencap Board Member

164. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

RESOLVED: That all items be considered with the press and public present.

165. **Minutes:**

A representative from a community group had contacted the Chair in advance of the meeting to suggest an amendment to the minutes which was agreed by the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2005, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendment:

Minute 159 Bullet Point 5 be replaced with:

"DIVERSITY: emphasis was placed on the need for the Council to address diversity in the Borough. Representatives emphasised that effective communication would require several strategies. One member suggested that information should be translated into multiple languages. However, it was argued that it was in the interest of community cohesion that resources be used to ensure that different communities have access to English classes that suit their needs."

166. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 15 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

167. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at this meeting under the provisions of the Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 13 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

168. **Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at this meeting under the provisions of Advisory Panel and Consultative Forum Procedure Rule 14 (Part 4E of the Constitution).

169. **Welcome to the Meeting:**

The Chair welcomed Members and representatives of community organisations to the meeting. She explained that the theme of the meeting, 'The Community Speaks', had been chosen in line with the work programme developed by community representatives and presented to the Forum's meeting on 12 April 2005.

She also informed representatives of a community message board on Harrow Council's Internet site, which enabled communication between Councillors, officers and members of the public on important issues.

170. **Update on Community Engagement:**

The Forum received a presentation on the community engagement strategy, Harrow Speaks, which had been the focus of a consultation exercise completed at the last meeting of the Forum on 29 June 2005.

The meeting was informed that the community engagement strategy aimed to involve and inform the community, to enable them to shape and improve Harrow Council's services and decision-making processes. The strategy would be used to produce a 'toolkit' of best practice methodologies that could be applied to the Council's community engagement activities. The officer cited current Council initiatives for improving public consultation, such as the Open Budget Process, Local Area Agreements and the scrutiny review of community engagement, Hear/Say.

In the discussion that followed, it was emphasised that the strategy aimed to provide officers and Councillors with the tools needed to engage effectively with the community. It was added that effective consultation then required an understanding of the groups to be engaged and the selection of the appropriate modes of consultation. The community engagement policy officer was working to identify hard to reach community groups and develop an understanding of their requirements.

A community representative underlined the need for partnership in engagement, and suggested that the community also needed to take responsibility for engagement and to lead activities on occasion. Several representatives suggested that poor attendance at some Council meetings was a result of the Council becoming more remote from the community organisations.

The meeting identified young people as a difficult group to effectively engage. A Member of the Forum informed the meeting that the Hear/Say scrutiny review was meeting a local youth group to hear their views on engagement, and invited interested parties to attend. It was emphasised that people could only attend to observe and listen, to inform themselves about how to engage with this hard to reach section of society.

RESOLVED: That the above be noted.

171. **Presentations from Community Groups:**

Colleagues from the community and voluntary sector had been invited to speak to the Forum about their experience of dealing with the Council. The presentations then led into a discussion on the issues raised by the representatives.

Presentation from founder of IJAPA

The founder of IJAPA, a new and emerging organisation in Harrow, gave the first presentation. She explained that the organisation's bad experiences had outweighed the good when engaging with the Council. Examples of their experiences were cited, including:

- When approaching Council departments, she had been referred from department to department, which had caused her to approach other boroughs to promote her work;

- Encouraged by the election of the Council's first African Councillor, IJAPA had worked with other African women in Harrow on Black History Month. The event had been marred by double-booking and cancelled reservations at the Civic Centre;
- The appointment of the Council's first African Caribbean Mayor had encouraged the organisation to continue engaging with the Council;
- Work on Black History Month in the subsequent years had proved more fruitful, with a wide variety of events organised and a lead role on the publicity sub-group. It was emphasised that volunteers from community organisations worked hard, and that the Council should therefore listen to them and remove any barriers to community participation;
- Most recently, letters had not been received from officers requesting further information on a grant application made to the Council, although reports to the Grants Advisory Panel had stated that the organisation had not submitted the information requested. On a more encouraging note, IJAPA highlighted the positive experience of working with Council officers from the Communications Unit.

In conclusion, the founder of IJAPA suggested that Harrow Council examine its practices and realise that:

- endless consultation without respecting constituent communities would serve no purpose;
- the Council's attitude should be how to make things happen rather than why things cannot be done.

Presentation from Representative of Groups within the Voluntary Sector

A representative of the voluntary sector who had worked with many organisations within Harrow addressed the Forum. He recounted his experiences of working with the Council whilst participating with various organisations in Harrow, and agreed with many of the observations made by the founder of IJAPA.

He gave an historical account of partnership working between the Council and organisations including Community Link Up, Harrow Carers' Support and Harrow Healthy Living Centre. The meeting was informed that the Healthy Living Centre had been established in partnership with the Council, although there had been many challenges in the partnership work. He described problems encountered, as outlined below:

- **Changes to Personnel** – frequent changes to Council staff created problems in continuity; due to these changes, work founded on the principles of partnership had disintegrated.
- **Providing services to the Council** – it was felt that the Council expected too much from organisations providing Service Level Agreements, without providing sufficient financial resources.
- **Unable to participate in meetings** – the representative told of his frustration at not being able to contribute to discussion at Member-level meetings. He added that this would deter people from making the effort to attend.
- **First Contact** – he informed the meeting that his attempts to contact the Council to offer his services had not been acknowledged. In addition, it was felt that lack of communication between departments made approaching the Council more difficult, especially for people with learning difficulties.
- **Reluctance to speak out** – it was felt that voluntary organisations were reluctant to speak out against the Council for fear that it would be detrimental to their organisation.

He concluded that he hoped the problems identified could be addressed through debate at Forum's like the Community Consultative Forum. The Open Budget Process was welcomed, and he commended the voluntary work of some officers and Members of the Council.

Discussion and Debate

In the discussion that followed, Members and community representatives raised the following issues:

1. **Changing the culture within the Council** – it was emphasised that the Council needed to address any reluctance on the part of officers of the Council when assisting members of the public.
2. **Councillor assistance** – Members encouraged representatives to approach them with any Council issues, particularly issues that they wished to be raised at committee meetings.
3. **Open Budget process** – this was generally commended, although a representative emphasised that sensible boundaries ought to be applied to avoid irresponsible spending.
4. **First Contact and complaints procedure** – Members informed the Forum that they had also had problems receiving information from Council officers, and recommended forwarding the request to more senior management. It was also felt that the complaints procedure was inefficient.
5. **Community Engagement Strategy** – when engaging, it was suggested that the focus ought to be on the more vulnerable, hard-to-reach sections of society.

In response to a query about pre-meetings at the Community Consultative Forum, the Chair advised that these had been re-instated at the request of community representatives, but then had been cancelled due to poor attendance.

The Chair highlighted the issue of participation in Member-level meetings by members of the public. She emphasised that the agenda provided opportunity for public representations within the standard agenda items 'Petitions', 'Public Questions' and 'Deputations', and noted that these were rarely utilised. It was suggested that members of the public should be better informed on how the democratic process worked.

RESOLVED: That the above be noted.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.15 pm)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR NANA ASANTE
Chair

APPENDIX 1

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIVE FORUM – 28 SEPTEMBER 2005**(1) Representatives of Community Organisations who Attended**

Farrukh Mahmood	Pakistan Women's Association Harrow
K Mahmood	Euro Pakistan Society
Kahlid Mahmood	Harrow Muslim Education Society
Moji Sorunke	IJAPA: Tales by Moonlight
Lt. Col Dawn Sewell	The Salvation Army UK
Punitha Perinparaja	Kala Anjali Arts Circle
	Harrow Interfaith Council
Mushtaq Kassam	K.S.I.M.C. Islamic Centre, Stanmore
Paul Tobiko	Harrow Mencap
Jesse Mashate	SAHARA
Varsha Bavishi	Harrow Mencap
Mike Coker	Community Link Up
Fahad Mohamed	HAVS
Deven Pillay	Harrow Mencap
Kanti Nagda	Sangat Centre
Alex da Costa	Harrow Regugee Forum

(2) Officers who Attended

Desiree Mahoney	Community Engagement Policy Officer
Ponnam Jaim	Community Premises Review Support Officer
Laura Kell	Democratic Services Officer

(3) Apologies Received

Pravina Patel	Victim Support Harrow
Trevor Chisolm	HACAS
Mike Hey	Shooting Star
Vernon Watts	Shooting Star
Adrian Bebbington	Tenant Participation Team Leader (Harrow Council)
Roger Smith	Traffic Case Study – Hearsay Review
Syed Alam	Harrow Bengalee Association
Baldev Sharma	Harrow Anti Racist Alliance
Neru Desai	Harrow Women's Association
Prem Pawar	Harrow Council for Racial Equality
Ajay Aggarwal	Harrow Council for Racial Equality