

**STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY
SUB-COMMITTEE****25 JUNE 2003**

Chair: * Councillor Keekira Thammaiah

Councillors: * Choudhury (2) * Vina Mithani
 * Janet Cowan * Omar
 * Ann Groves * Seymour

* Denotes Member present
 (2) Denotes category of Reserve Member

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL**PART II - MINUTES**

46. **Appointment of Chair:**
RESOLVED: To note the appointment at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 May 2003, under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 11.2, of Councillor Thammaiah, as Chair of the Sub-Committee for the 2003/2004 Municipal Year.
47. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**
RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Member: -
- | <u>Ordinary Member</u> | <u>Reserve Member</u> |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Councillor Nana Asante | Councillor Choudhury |
48. **Declarations of Interest:**
RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:
- | <u>Agenda Item</u> | <u>Member</u> | <u>Nature of Interest</u> |
|---|-----------------------|--|
| 13. Better Government for Older People | Councillor Ann Groves | The Member indicated a personal interest, as she was a member of the Better Government for Older People Panel. The Member remained in the room whilst the matter was considered and took part in the discussion relating to this item. |
| 14 Possible Closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court | Councillor Ann Groves | The Member indicated a personal interest, as she was a magistrate on the bench at Harrow Magistrates' Court. The Member remained in the room whilst the matter was considered and took part in the discussion relating to this item. |
| 16. Current Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee's Work Programme 2002/03 | Councillor Seymour | The Member indicated a personal and prejudicial interest, as he was currently involved with the Council's Housing Benefits Service and could therefore not participate in any future scrutiny review in this area. The Member remained in the room, as there was no further discussion on this matters. (<i>Minute 16 below refers</i>). |
49. **Arrangement of Agenda:**
RESOLVED: (1) That all items be considered with the press and public present;

(2) that item 11 'Cross Cutting Review of Safer Harrow's Improvement Plan' be taken in advance of item 10 'Presentation on Youth Crime';

(3) that item 14 'Possible Closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court' be taken in advance of item 13 'Better Government for Older People'.

50. **Minutes:**
RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 April 2003 be deferred until printed in the next Council Bound Minute Volume.
51. **Appointment of Vice-Chair:**
RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Seymour as Vice-Chair of the Sub-Committee for the 2003/2004 Municipal Year.
52. **Public Questions:**
RESOLVED: To note that there were no public questions to be received at this meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 8 (Part 4F of the Constitution).
53. **Petitions:**
RESOLVED: To note that there were no petitions to be received at this meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 9 (Part 4F of the Constitution).
54. **Deputations:**
RESOLVED: To note that there were no deputations to be received at this meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 10 (Part 4F of the Constitution).
55. **Cross Cutting Review of Safer Harrow's Improvement Plan:**
The Sub-Committee received the joint report of the Chief Environmental Health Officer and Interim Head of Service for the Crime Reduction Unit, Drugs Action Team and Youth Offending Service. The report summarised the final report for the Safer Harrow Best Value Review. The Crime Reduction Manager requested that Members feedback on the conclusions contained in the executive summary and the improvement plan.

The Sub-Committee was informed of the background information, methodology, process and scope of the review. The Crime Reduction Manager advised that the Council had developed an effective partnership various local organisations; the police, community groups, etc; to address crime and disorder and that the performance of the Crime Reduction Unit has been good despite receiving low levels of funding. Members were invited to comment on any aspect of the Crime Reduction Unit's approach to date.

A Member of the Sub-Committee queried whether information could be provided on progress currently made against the five areas that respondents prioritised as requiring action to improve safety and reduce crime in the town centres. The five areas highlighted by respondents were: more police patrols; more youth activities; more CCTV (close circuit television); environmental improvements; and more work with offenders and improved street lighting.

In response, the Crime Reduction Manager advised Members that police patrols were still inadequate due to local police resources being relocated to inner London, in order to support anti-terrorism measures. Members were informed that other local initiatives were being used to fill this deficit, for example the work of the Community Support Officers and the Street Wardens. It was hoped that Harrow would have 19 Community Support Officers in post by the end of 2003. Members were additionally informed that neighbourhood patrols were also being recruited, in order to achieve local targets through local initiatives.

The Chair commented that the Street Wardens had made a significant difference in Wealdstone and that all involved in the establishment of this service were to be congratulated. A Member of the Panel seconded the Chair's comments and requested that every effort be made to retain the current number of Street Wardens with a view to increasing the number as and when funding became available.

Another Member suggested the creation of Park Wardens, as particularly high fear of crime levels had been reported in park areas. The Crime Reduction Manager advised that during a recent conference he attended on crime and disorder, the speaker stated that many young people were also wary of entering parks. He therefore felt it was

important to promote the mixed use of park areas, which could be achieved through increased police/warden presence.

The Crime Reduction Manager advised Members that there was a clear national agenda in place with regards to youth activities and that it was envisaged that external funding would become available from central government to support these initiatives. Members were informed that the introduction of CCTV in Harrow has assisted in reducing the high fear of crime levels in the Borough and that the Council would be receiving a mobile CCTV vehicle in August/September 2003.

The Sub-Committee was informed that officers were currently putting together a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) bid to deal with the problem of insufficient street lighting in Harrow and that the areas identified as having the highest fear of crime levels would be dealt with first, as and when funding became available.

In response to a question from a Member, the Crime Reduction Manager advised that progress was measured against police crime figures and that this was the main benchmark. Members were additionally advised that there was a correlation between the reduction in street crime and the increased usage of CCTV within the Borough and that burglary had gradually increased over the last 2-3 years following the reduction in the impact of the police crime initiative 'Operation Bumblebee'. The Crime Reduction Manager clarified the difference between street crime and burglary: the former being theft from a person and the latter being theft from a property.

A Member queried whether Wealdstone Police Station would be replaced by community groups or would work in conjunction with community groups at the same location. The Crime Reduction Manager advised that the intention was for Wealdstone Police Station to be run as a police station but with community organisation support and an increased focus on community-led activities.

The Sub-Committee discussed the multi-agency involvement in the regeneration and redevelopment of the Byron Park area. A Member commented that members of the community, of all ages, were now engaging in the area and that there was a perceptible difference in the safety and respectability of the area. The Member encouraged the usage of multi-agency initiatives and recommended that Byron Park be used as a model of best practice and copied in other areas of the Borough.

The officer wished for it to be clarified whether he should continue reporting to the Best Value Advisory Panel or the Sub-Committee with reference to updates on the Improvement Plan. Members agreed that the Sub-Committee was the appropriate body to updates on the progression of the Plan.

RESOLVED: (1) That the Sub-Committee requested updates on the progression of the Improvement Plan.

(2) that the joint report of the Chief Environmental Health Officer and Interim Head of Service for Crime Reduction Unit, Drugs Action Team and Youth Offending Service, be noted.

56. **Presentation on Youth Crime:**

The Sub-Committee received the verbal presentation of the Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS), which outlined the Council's multi-agency approach and current performance in relation to youth crime and youth crime prevention in line with the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act. The multi-agency approach incorporates the utilisation of the following agencies: the police; the probation service; health authorities (PCT); education services; social services; Connexions; and other youth specialists.

Members were informed that the Council's Youth Offending Team (YOT) currently consists of 22 full-time members of staff and 50 volunteers. The role of the YOT is to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour by young people and to deal with young offenders and their victims once a crime has been committed. The Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) provided Members with a number of figures in relation to the youth crime rate: -

- (i) In 2002, 335 young people usually resident in Harrow were convicted of 624 offences.
- (ii) In 2002, the number of young people convicted of the Government's priority crimes (i.e. domestic burglary, robbery and vehicle crime) decreased by 46% overall in Harrow (22% nationally).

OFFENCE	Number of young people normally resident in Harrow convicted of an offence in 2001	Number of young people normally resident in Harrow convicted of an offence in 2002
Vehicle crime	42	28
Robbery	36	17
Domestic Burglary	25	12

- (iii) In 2002, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) targets for crime prevention were achieved and exceeded in Harrow. In comparison with the figures produced in 2001, there had been a 52% reduction in domestic burglary, a 33% reduction in vehicle crime and a 53% reduction in robbery.
- (iv) In 2002, the following categories of youth crimes were recorded: -

Category	Number of Offences	Percentage
Theft and Handling	168	26.0%
Motoring	124	19.2%
Violence Against the Person	69	10.7%
Drugs	62	9.6%
Criminal Damage	45	6.9%
Robbery	35	5.4%
Vehicle Theft	27	4.1%
Fraud and Forgery	23	3.5%
Public Order	19	2.9%
Breach of Bail	16	2.4%
Domestic Burglary	14	2.1%
Racially Aggravated	13	2.0%
Non Domestic Burglary	11	1.7%
Breach of Statutory Order	8	1.2%
Other	8	1.2%
Breach of Conditional Discharge	1	0.1%
Arson	1	0.1%

The Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) also provided Members with a number of figures in relation to the youth recidivism (re-offending) rate: -

- (i) In 2001, 54.75% of young people re-offended within a year of being convicted, in 2002, the recidivism rate was only 30.25%.
- (ii) The recidivism rate of the 2000 cohort (after 12 months) was compared to the 2001 cohort (after 12 months) evidenced a reduction in re-offending of more than 3% for all four 'outcome' groups; a 3% reduction was the YJB target.
- (iii) There was a 53% reduction at the pre-court stage, an 8% decrease for 'first tier' penalties, a 48% decrease for community penalties and a 50% reduction for those receiving custody.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) provided the Sub-Committee with a breakdown of the ethnicity of young offenders: -

Ethnicity	Percentage
White	53.5%
Black or Black British	20%
Asian or Asian British	18.6%
Chinese or Other Ethnic Group	2.8%
Unknown	2.2
Mixed	1.7%

The Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) advised that Members that the YOT was utilising a strict performance management system to tackle youth crime, consisting of a three-year Youth Justice Plan, which was to be updated annually with increased performance targets. The Sub-Committee was informed that the Youth Justice Plan was required to be authorised by the Chief Executive and the YJB and that this year the plan had been accepted by both in the first instance, without the need for further amendments.

Copies of the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP) were circulated to the Sub-Committee and the Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) discussed the content contained therein with Members. The Sub-Committee was informed that ISSP is a regime, which closely monitors the activities of young people who have offended and can be used where a secure remand or custodial sentence might otherwise be an option. Each scheme may utilise a mix of the following types of surveillance: tracking, tagging, voice verification and intelligence-led policing, alongside detailed and constructive supervision.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) advised that there was an array of restorative justice-based 'punishments' for young offenders, ranging from supervised activities, such as the removal of graffiti, to reparation with victims of crime. The Referral Order process by which young offenders were brought before a Panel, formed from a pool of approximately 40 volunteers from the local community, was also discussed.

The Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) described some of the benefits of the YOT: -

- (i) The YOT has brought together a range of agencies to combat youth crime. This kind of co-operative working has allowed agencies to learn from one another and share good practice.
- (ii) These agencies (police, probation, health, education, social services and Connexions and youth specialist staff) have been co-located in one office, which enables clear and timely communication.
- (iii) Systems and protocols have been produced to provide guidance to the members of staff from each agency, in order for the service to maintain consistency.
- (iv) Information is shared through one database. Therefore, all information on a young person can be accessed directly. This has enabled fast and effective targeting of services across the different agencies.
- (v) A new culture has been created whereby all the required resources to deal with offenders can be delivered from the same site.

Members were advised that it was important to build on the success of the YOT in Harrow, which was graded in the top 10% of YOTs in the country. The YOT has also made steady progress in reducing the fear of crime and reclaiming public areas, for example parks and bus stations, through joint working with the Crime Reduction Unit, the police and local communities.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) advised the Sub-Committee that the age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales was 10 years of age, and that the YOT therefore dealt with youth aged from 10 to 18. Members were additionally informed that since April 2003, through financial support from the Children's Fund, the YOT have been able to get involved with youths aged between 5 and 10 years old. It was envisaged that through earlier intervention with vulnerable children, the YOT would be able to take preventative measures to ensure that these children did not become future clients of the statutory agencies.

The Sub-Committee was informed that teachers and learning assistants could sometimes detect children that may fall into the 'vulnerable' category, for example children who had disengaged themselves from school or children whose parents exhibited a lack of concern for their welfare. The YOT was currently developing parenting courses for parents who fell into this latter category. In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) stated that the youth court had the power to make a parenting order but that the YOT would prefer for the parents of the young offender to attend the parenting course voluntarily, upon hearing the advice of the magistrates. Members were informed that the course had a

significant take-up rate.

The Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) advised that the YOT was also assisting some youths at the other end of the age spectrum, namely 18 to 21 year olds. Members were advised that the Home Office was currently looking into the possibility of removing the responsibility for 18 to 21 year olds from the Probation Service to the YOT. A Member of the Panel welcomed this proposal and stated that it would undoubtedly be a great help if the YOT took on this additional work. The Member also wished for the good work and recent successes of the YOT to be recorded and for all the individuals involved with the work of the team to be congratulated on their efforts to date.

The Panel discussed the effect of the Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) with the Sub-Committee and noted that it was important for young people to be prosecuted for the crimes they had committed in order for them to understand and realise the consequences of their actions. Members were informed that the criminal justice process (the time from arrest to sentence) had been accelerated due in part to all the information on the young person being contained on the same database at the YOT's office.

In response to another question from a Member, the Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) advised that pre-YOT, the Social Services Youth Justice Team would become involved with a young person only at the post-conviction stage, whereas currently the YOT would become involved with a young offender from the point at which they were being charged or even arrested. Members were informed that this process of early intervention was assisted by the existence of a police officer within the YOT, who could feedback reports on young people, received daily from the custody suite at the police station.

The Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) informed the Sub-Committee that the YOT was encouraging victims of crime to increase their involvement in the criminal justice system. However, Members were informed that currently the YOT was prevented from obtaining information on victims unless they gave their express permission, due to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. Therefore, the YOT could not obtain personal information about the victim until after the conviction. One way around this problem could be to recruit an individual to the post of Victim Liaison Worker. This individual would have the capacity to work jointly with the police and the YOT to contact the victim and involve them in the process, if they so wished. If the victim consents to involvement then the YOT would take over and work with the victim to obtain justice for them, for example, by updating them on the current status of the investigation or by offering reparation with the offender at a later stage.

The Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) informed Members that the current target from arrest to sentence was 71 days for persistent offenders and that to date this target had been mostly been met by the YOT. Members were advised that meeting 71 days for all offenders was difficult to achieve due to the fact that offenders could 'jump' bail, require psychiatric assessment or drug rehabilitation or there could be complicated forensic issues relating to the crime committed, all leading to lengthy delay.

In response to a question from a Member in relation to the fixed penalty notice scheme, the Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) advised that the YOT have not had any direct involvement with the scheme to date and that the YOT's future involvement, if any, would depend on how the scheme would be brought into effect. It was likely that lead responsibility would rest with the police.

A Member of the Panel welcomed the presentation of the Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) and enquired whether there was anything that the Council could do to publicise and promote the work of the YOT. The Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) advised that there was an article in Harrow People approximately a year ago detailing the work of the YOT and that the team currently had a media strategy and regularly formulated press releases. Members were also informed that young people had devised posters and flyers for the reparation programme, which could be displayed in public places, and that an article had also been published in a national teenage magazines with reference to the consequences of being caught shoplifting. Information is also available on the YOT Intranet and Internet web sites.

The Member requested that the work of the YOT be re-published in Harrow People, with an update on recent initiatives and successes of the team. Another Member requested that it be noted in any future article that the work of the YOT has cross-party support. The Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) thanked the Sub-Committee for

their positive comments and advised that he would pass on these comments to the YOT.

RESOLVED: (1) That the work of the YOT be re-published in Harrow People, with an update on recent initiatives and successes of the team;

(2) that the presentation of the Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) be welcomed and noted.

57. **Verbal Progress Report on Current Community Issues:**

The Manager of the Strategic Partnership Section circulated a document to Members of the Sub-Committee detailing a table of issues discussed by the Chair and representatives from numerous community groups. The Chair requested that Members analyse the issues raised during the meetings between the Chair of the Sub-Committee and numerous community group representatives and feedback to either the Chair or the Manager of the Strategic Partnership Section or the Sub-Committee as a whole at a future meeting.

A Member of the Sub-Committee queried the accuracy of issue 6; high number of elderly and little provision for after school activities for youths. It was therefore agreed that Members be provided with the correct statistics with reference to the elderly population in Harrow.

The Sub-Committee discussed issue 5; there is a need to strengthen the Harrow Association of Voluntary Service (HAVS) and the sector as a whole in order to make them less dependent on the Council in the future. A Member queried the use of the word 'strengthen' and advised that if it was intended to be a request for further funding that it needed to be made more specific.

Members discussed the possibility of appointing a scrutiny review group to examine the current situation with regards to the premises available for community group meetings/occupation, which were currently owned by the Authority. A Member suggested that the review group focus on schools, as many schools' premises were greatly under-used during out-of-school hours. The Chair advised that this was an area that the Sub-Committee could review in greater depth and that he would discuss this possibility with the Manager of the Strategic Partnership Section prior to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee.

A Member expressed concern about issue 7; there is a need for elected members to be aware of the work of the voluntary service and how this supports they provide to Council activities. The Member stated that many Councillors had extensive knowledge of community groups and their activities and that perhaps the community groups needed to learn more about the role and work of the Councillors. Another Member suggested that Members of the Sub-Committee could visit the community premises owned by the Council to meet and talk with community group representatives. The Chair welcomed this proposal and requested that Members who wished to speak with community group representatives should make arrangements with the Manager of the Strategic Partnership Section.

RESOLVED: (1) That Members analyse the issues raised during the meetings between the Chair of the Sub-Committee and numerous community group representatives and feedback to either the Chair or the Manager of the Strategic Partnership Section or the Sub-Committee as a whole at a future meeting;

(2) that Member be provided with the correct statistics in relation to the elderly population in Harrow;

(3) that the Chair discuss the possibility of appointing a scrutiny review group to examine the current number of available premises owned by the Council with the Manager of the Strategic Partnership Section.

58. **Possible Closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court:**

The Sub-Committee received a verbal update from Councillor Ann Groves regarding the proposed closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court. Councillor Groves advised that the decision to close the courthouse was supposed to be announced on 30 May 2003 but had been postponed, and no new date had been set. Members were informed that the Greater London Magistrates' Courts Authority (GLMCA) and the Court Service were investigating a possible merger with Harrow Crown Court.

It was hoped that the work of the Magistrates' Court would be absorbed into the

building of the Crown Court, preserving the administration of local justice in Harrow. Councillor Groves advised that there was sufficient space within the building to enable this move, as numerous tribunals have been held at the Crown Court to absorb their excess space.

The Sub-Committee was informed that Harrow Magistrates' Court at present time, required more work to make it more suitable for the administration of modern justice, therefore, co-location of Harrow Crown Court with Harrow Magistrates' Court was the preferred option. It was also highlighted that the Magistrates' Court was not effective in respect of the separation of witnesses and defendants, and there was not sufficient accommodation for the police service on site.

Councillor Groves advised that, despite current difficulties, Harrow Magistrates' Court still provided a very high level of service for the local community, and that it was important for this service to be situated locally. Members were informed that if the move to the Crown Court was abandoned and the move to Brent upheld, then it was likely that a number of existing Magistrates would resign from the Bench.

Councillor Groves, with agreement from other Sub-Committee Members, vocalised the need for the Authority to undertake a Feasibility Study for the joint use of Harrow Crown Court building, and that the Borough Solicitor be requested to acquire agreement on this proposal.

RESOLVED: (1) That the Borough Solicitor be requested to seek Council involvement in a Feasibility Study for joint use of the Harrow Crown Court building with the business of Harrow Magistrates' Court;

(2) that Sub-Committee Members be consulted on the draft response with Feasibility Study; and

(3) that the verbal presentation of Councillor Ann Groves be noted.

59. **Better Government for Older People:**

The Sub-Committee received a verbal report from Councillor Ann Groves, which outlined the current situation between the Better Government for Older People (BGOP) Panel and the Partnership with Older People (POP) Panels, of which there were currently 14. Members were advised that an informal meeting of the BGOP Panel was being planned to discuss support and funding for the POP Panels. Members were informed that funding for the POP Panels could cease in 2004 and that it was important for the BGOP Panel to address this funding issue in order to devise bids for alternative funding in good time.

Councillor Groves advised Members that the BGOP Members' Panel was also being revived in order to discuss the Panel's Terms of Reference and to raise awareness of the past and present work of the POP Panels and to ensure that these activities did not cease.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report from Councillor Ann Groves be noted.

60. **Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2002/03:**

RESOLVED: That the Chair's report of the Sub-Committee's work over the past year be approved, without amendment, for inclusion in the 2002/2003 Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report.

61. **Current Strengthening Communities Work Programme for 2003/04:**

The Sub-Committee received the current Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee Work Programme for the 2003/2004 Municipal Year and were advised to select items for inclusion in the agenda for the next meeting of the Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED: That the following items be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Sub-Committee on 15 October 2003: -

- (i) Presentation from the Harrow Association of Voluntary Service (HAVS).
- (ii) A report back from the Manager of the Strategic Partnerships Section on issue 12 of the progress report on current community issues (agenda item 12): good practice and expertise in the voluntary sector should be disseminated to other community groups.
- (iii) Scoping report on the operation of the Housing Benefits Service; with a view to

appointing a scrutiny review group to examine issues in this area at the next meeting.

[Note: The Chair, Councillor Thammaiah, and Councillor Vina Mithani recorded that they wished to be appointed to this scrutiny review group].

- (iv) New Harrow Project Strategic Partnership report; progress report on the development of the community strategy.
- (v) Verbal update from Councillor Ann Groves on the proposed closure of Harrow Magistrates' Court.

62. **Domestic Violence Reference to Cabinet on 17 June 2003:**

Members received an extract from the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet on 17 June 2003, *Minute 278*, which detailed Cabinet's response to the Sub-Committee's reference on domestic violence.

RESOLVED: (1) That Cabinet's response to the Sub-Committee's reference regarding domestic violence be noted and recorded as a success for the Sub-Committee;

(2) that letters be sent to the Domestic Violence Forum, Victim Support and the Women's Centre advising them of Cabinet's response to the Sub-Committee's reference.

(Note: The meeting having commenced at 7:30 pm, closed at 9:56 pm.)

(Signed) COUNCILLOR KEEKIRA THAMMAIAH
Chair