

**REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	27 July 2010
<b>Subject:</b>	Pool of Advisers
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Alex Dewsnap, Divisional Director Partnership Development and Performance
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member area:</b>	Not applicable, report concerns all scrutiny areas.
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Enclosures:</b>	None

## **Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations**

This report sets out details of the pool of advisors and seeks the committee's continued endorsement of the approach and the development of scrutiny's practice in the area of community engagement.

**Recommendations:**

That the committee:

1. Endorse the work of the pool of advisors and the use of the pool by scrutiny for future community engagement activity.

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **Introduction**

During the previous administration the Committee established a ‘pool of advisors’ to support and strengthen the work of scrutiny. Given the developments in community engagement practice since 2008, this report outlines how scrutiny can strengthen its activity through the pool.

### **Background and current situation**

For several years scrutiny has drawn upon the experience of members of the local community by enabling individuals with specific experience, skills and knowledge to work alongside councillors on projects and reviews. These ‘advisors’ have included both interested individuals as well as representatives of local voluntary and community organisations.

During the previous administration the Committee agreed to establish a ‘pool of advisors’ in order to bring this group together. The pool has met to support work programming process and to work with the committee chairman and scrutiny lead members.

Since then the council overall has strengthened its community engagement activity. To ensure that scrutiny is in keeping with the council’s approach the pool will now be managed jointly by the council’s scrutiny team and policy officer for community engagement.

This means that the role of the pool of advisors is enhanced, as interested local people will be able to participate in consultation activity as well as becoming involved in scrutiny. This prevents duplication and ensures that scrutiny consultation and engagement activity is undertaken within the context of the council’s wider community engagement approach.

All local people who have previously participated in the pool of advisors will be included in re-launch of the pool (see below). Recruitment for additional panel members has begun through a range of methods:

- The consultation finder database
- Harrow People
- A stand at the Under One Sky Event on 27 June

The pool will participate in consultation such as focus groups and e-participation (discussion forums, email and so on); panel members will also have the opportunity to participate in scrutiny reviews alongside elected councillors in order to bring a resident or ‘community expert’ perspective to projects being undertaken. Involvement in scrutiny activity will continue to include identifying topics further investigation.

### **Launch event**

It is proposed that the pool be re-launched at an event to be held in October 2010. This event will enable advisors to be introduced to their role and to meet scrutiny councillors.

It is proposed that scrutiny members also use the opportunity to discuss areas which might benefit from consideration by scrutiny. Possible dates for the launch are:

- Thursday 14 October
- Monday 18 October
- Thursday 21 October

### **Why a change is needed**

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act placed a 'duty to involve' local people on local authorities. This means that the council will inform, consult and involve people in matters that affect their daily lives.

Aside from the legislative duty, by joining with the council's corporate approach to engagement, scrutiny avoids duplicating contact with the community. This approach has the potential to save resources as well as ensuring that the council engages with residents intelligently. Such an approach is also in keeping with the new Coalition Government's 'Big Society' agenda, which aims to draw on the skills and expertise of local people in facing social, political and economic challenges.

### **Financial Implications**

Any costs arising from the pool and the launch will be met from within existing resources.

### **Performance Issues**

National indicator NI 4, the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality, relates to this area of work. The future of the National Indicator Set is at this stage unclear.

### **Environmental Impact**

There are no specific environmental impacts associated with endorsing the approach outlined in the report. However, in undertaking consultation activity scrutiny should be mindful of possible impacts on traffic and transport, procurement of materials and reducing energy use.

### **Risk Management Implications**

There are no specific risks connected with the endorsement of the approach outlined within this report. However, in all of its consultation activity outside the Civic Centre, scrutiny must be mindful of the need to risk assess arrangements and to put in place measures to reduce risks identified.

## **Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance**

Not required for this report.

## **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

**Contact:** Heather Smith, Scrutiny Officer, 020 8420 9203,  
[heather.smith@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:heather.smith@harrow.gov.uk)

**Background Papers:**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 12 February 2008, *Appointment of Non-Voting Advisors to the Overview and Scrutiny committee*

<http://www.harrow.gov.uk/www2/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=276&MID=3959&J=3#A142657>