

HARROW COUNCIL

Meeting:	Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee
Date:	14 October 2004
Subject:	Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Key decision:	No
Responsible Chief Officer:	Director of Organisational Performance
Relevant Portfolio Holder:	N/A
Status:	Part I
Ward:	N/A
Enclosures:	Appendix A – Draft Chair’s contribution for the Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Scrutiny Sub-Committees agreed, in the last cycle of 2003/04, the process by which the 2003/04 annual report should be prepared and agreed for presentation to Council.
- 1.2 This process provided for a composite report to be produced which includes an overview of the work undertaken over the past year, supported by individual contributions from each of the scrutiny bodies. A draft Chair’s contribution for this Sub-Committee is attached for Members’ consideration.

2. **Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Sub-Committee approve the draft Chair’s report on the Sub-Committee’s work over the past year for inclusion in the 2003/04 scrutiny annual report.

3. **Consultation with Ward Councillors**

- 3.1 Not applicable.

4. **Policy Context (including Relevant Previous Decisions)**

- 4.1 The annual report will address the requirement placed on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to report to Council on the work done in the previous year and on its annual work programme for the forthcoming year.

5. **Relevance to Corporate Priorities**

5.1 The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Sub-Committees seeks to support all of the Council's corporate and strategic priorities.

6. **Background Information and options considered**

6.1 N/A

7. **Consultation**

7.1 All of the Scrutiny Sub-Committees are being consulted on their particular draft Chair's report before the inclusion of the section in the full annual report, which will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 October 2004.

8. **Finance Observations**

8.1 This report is not seeking additional financial resources.

9. **Legal Observations**

9.1 Article 6.03(d) of the Council Constitution provides that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will report annually to full Council on its workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amend working methods, if appropriate.

10. **Conclusion**

10.1 The Sub-Committee is requested approve the draft Chair's report on the Sub-Committee's work over the past year for inclusion in the 2003/04 scrutiny annual report.

11. **Background Papers**

11.1 None.

12. **Author**

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Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Overview of work undertaken

The work of the Strengthening Communities Sub-Committee over the past year has focused on:

- The Harrow Strategic Partnership
- The development of the Community Strategy for Harrow
- A review of post offices
- Support for efforts to retain the Harrow Magistrates' Court locally
- Developing a better understanding of voluntary and community sector organisations in Harrow.

Key areas of impact

Since the launch of the Harrow's local strategic partnership in May 2003, we have examined membership of the Harrow Strategic Partnership (HSP) to ensure that it reflects government guidance, best practice and the representation of local agencies in Harrow.

A key area where we have been able to have impact concerned the proposed closure by the Greater London Magistrates Court Authority (GLMCA) of the Harrow Magistrates Court. We have considered and co-ordinated efforts by local agencies including the Magistrates' Court itself, the council, police and various stakeholders, in developing an appeal against the decision to close the local facility, which was successful.

The Sub-Committee has overseen the development of the Community Strategy for Harrow, with a particular focus on consultation on the draft strategy. By virtue of the Local Government Act 2000, local authorities are required to produce a Community Strategy that has to be developed and monitored through a local partnership arrangement. Harrow's Strategy has been developed through the HSP. We received reports on the consultation on the draft Strategy as well as the results of the consultation activities undertaken with partners, stakeholders and residents.

Having been informed of the Post Office's plans to review its sub post office provision, the Sub-Committee has conducted a review. The object of this review was to gather information in preparation for the formal consultation of the Council in September/October 2004, which will be conducted over a six-week period. In February the review group met with Kay Dixon, Chairman of Postwatch Greater London, which gave the group an insight into the Post Office Ltd's consultation processes. The meeting was also attended by two Ealing Councillors, which offered the group the opportunity to learn from Ealing's experiences. The group has examined maps produced by staff in Urban Living, detailing the location of post offices within the borough, as well as some relevant demographic information about the borough and also met with representatives of the business and voluntary sector communities. This work has helped the authority to prepare for the forthcoming consultation and we are pleased that the Council leadership has agreed, following consideration of our report, that Harrow should consult the local community on the proposals that will be set out by Post Office Ltd and incorporate these findings into a written response.

We have continued to receive presentations from local community and voluntary sector agencies at their meetings in order that elected members may develop their knowledge on the current issues facing the sector locally. This area of our work could be developed as a means to engage these sectors to a greater extent.

Areas of Work Planned for 2004/5

Areas of work are to include monitoring of the implementation of the Community Strategy for Harrow, youth offending and anti-social behaviour, the Harrow Vitality Profile and the impact on the Council's work, community cohesion, monitoring of the strategic review of grants to voluntary organisations, and monitoring of Local Public Service Agreement Targets (Drug Misuse and Treatment and Reduction in Robberies). We will also be contributing to the Council's consultation process for, and response to, the Post Office Ltd's closure proposals in Harrow, which the Council is expecting to receive in September.

Keeki Thammaiah

Chair, Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee