

**REPORT FOR: PERFORMANCE AND  
FINANCE SCRUTINY  
SUB-COMMITTEE**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	6 April 2011
<b>Subject:</b>	Response to Recommendations on Community Sustainability made by the Overview and Scrutiny Sustainability Review
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Brendon Hills – Corporate Director Community and Environment
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member area:</b>	Councillor Stanley Sheinwald, Policy Lead - Sustainable Development and Enterprise Councillor Sue Anderson, Performance Lead - Sustainable Development and Enterprise
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Enclosures:</b>	Appendix 1: Community cohesion action plan Appendix 2: Definition of integration and cohesion Appendix 3: Welcome Guide

**Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations**

This report sets out the Council's response to the recommendations for community sustainability set out in the Overview and Scrutiny committee's 'Sustainability Review' (February 2010).

**Recommendations:**

1. To note the actions taken in addressing the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Sustainability Review regarding community sustainability.

## Section 2 – Report

### 2.1 Introductory paragraph

This report sets out the Council's response to the recommendations regarding community sustainability contained in the Sustainability Review. The actions taken support the Council's vision of 'Working together: our Harrow our community' and its corporate priorities in particular, 'United and involved communities – a Council that listens and leads'.

### 2.2 Background

The Overview and Scrutiny committee undertook a 'Sustainability review' that concluded with the issuing of a final report in February 2010. The review was divided into three separate work streams that looked at:

- **Environmental sustainability** - which considered the Council's climate change strategy
- **Economic sustainability** - which considered the effectiveness of the Council and partner's support for residents during the economic downturn
- **Community sustainability** – which considered the impact of the economic downturn on the cohesion of the Harrow community

#### 2.2.1 The report's recommendations for community sustainability were:

- a. We remain concerned about the potential impact the recession could have on our diverse community and urge that the Council does not become complacent in its efforts to support the community to continue to develop constructively. As an example, we welcome initiatives such as the 'Declaration of Unity' which followed attempts by outside organisations to undermine the cohesiveness of our community, but would urge that these initiatives are part of a **broader, strategic approach to community development** and not one-off reactive projects.
- b. Whilst we recognise that this conference has not offered an in-depth investigation of the complexities of maintaining a cohesive community, it has identified a number of issues which should be borne in mind in the Council's ongoing work. To this end, we recommend that the **debate which has started, particularly around the nature of community and the nature of cohesion is continued**. It is only through this open and honest exchange of views that we can move forward together as a strong and cohesive community.
- c. In this context we also recommend that the findings of this conference are referred to the Corporate Director of Community and Environment for inclusion in the refresh of the Community Development Strategy.

- d. **Consideration should be given to the recommendations made by young people** interviewed as part of the review.

#### 2.2.2 Recommendations made by young people

As part of the community cohesion strand of the review, members of the group met with Harrow Youth Parliament and the Student Advisory Council to discuss the following questions:

- Do you feel that there is a “sense” of community within the borough and amongst its residents?
- How well do you think all the different groups of people who live in Harrow get along?
- Do you have much interaction with older residents and different cultural groups that live in Harrow?
- What initiatives and schemes are you aware of in Harrow, that allow the different groups to get to know one another better or spend time with one another?
- Do you think Harrow Council is doing enough / doing a good job to promote a strong sense of community? If not why not?
- What could be done to make it better?

#### 2.2.3 **The following recommendations were proposed by the young people:**

- Residents should organise a week of action in their neighbourhoods to foster community cohesion and the council should help to fund it.
- In addition to the residents week of action there should be an international week or international event that lasts more than one day that continues to foster community bonds.
- Rather than concentrating on organising big community events more energy should be put into organising smaller local events that can evolve and grow into bigger events over time. Advertisements should be placed in the Arrow or Harrow People encouraging people to have street parties. The Council should consider whether financial assistance can be provided to support this.
- Where possible community centres should be made available / built as they would help facilitate a forum where the community can meet and start to bond with each other.
- A cultural orientation programme should be devised for parents who come from outside of the UK to help them to fully engage in UK culture.

### 2.3 **Current situation**

In response to the recommendations of the Sustainability Review the following actions have been undertaken:

#### 2.3.1 Developing a broader / strategic approach

In April 2010 the Harrow Chief Executive’s group prioritised community cohesion as an area of work for the Harrow Strategic Partnership (HSP). It commissioned the Community Cohesion Management Group

(CCMG) a sub-group of the partnership, to develop a community cohesion action plan (Appendix 1) based on a partnership approach.

2.3.2 The community cohesion action plan aimed to provide a strategic approach to addressing issues of community cohesion in the borough. It pulled together all activities taking place across the HSP that supported the delivery of community cohesion and identified opportunities where local organisations (statutory, voluntary, community and faith sector) could work together to build strong communities and improve levels of cohesion in Harrow.

2.3.3 Based on the definition of integration and cohesion provided by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion 'Our Shared Futures' (2007) Appendix 2, the action plan identified the need to focus in two areas:

- I. Integration, welcome and equality of access to services for 'newer arrivals' (including those recently arrived as well as those who have settled in Harrow for up to 10-15 years).
- II. Reinforcing positive messages about trust, recognition and commonality with established communities (ie. those communities that have a strong sense of ownership about living in Harrow).

2.3.4 The actions contained within the action plan were set within the framework of the LAA national indicator set. The national indicator NI 1 was used to measure cohesion levels in the borough and in 2009 the Place Survey identified that 78% of people felt that people from different backgrounds get on well together. As this framework is no longer in place the CCMG has looked at what other measures can be used going forward. These are likely to include monthly monitoring of community tension levels, hate crime reporting figures and continued use of the question 'do people from different backgrounds get on well together' in the reputation tracker and residents panel survey.

2.3.5 Continuing the debate around the nature of community and the nature of cohesion

The CCMG has responsibility for overseeing the strategic management and delivery of community cohesion in the Borough. It has a key role in ensuring that the debate around the nature of community and the nature of cohesion are continued. To ensure that it is able to continue to achieve its aims and objectives the Group is currently reviewing its terms of reference and reevaluating its role and function.

2.3.6 Events

Events that bring communities together are an important part of the overall strategy to support community sustainability. The reputation tracker report of November 2009 showed that 73% of residents felt that events like Under One Sky helped bring Harrow's communities together.

2.3.7 The Council has for many years worked with the community to support the delivery of both borough-wide and local events such as street

parties. The programme of events has been expanded to include events such as Inter-faith week to increase opportunities for dialogue and learning between those from different communities. The future delivery of events will move more towards the greater involvement and ownership of events by the community. From our experience of involving the community it is evident that this type of activity helps build capacity, confidence and cohesion.

#### 2.3.8 Neighbourhood projects

In 2009 the Community Connects programme delivered events at ward level such as street parties, fun days etc. with the specific aim of working in wards where cohesion levels were considered to be low (through the analysis of the MORI survey results). A range of activities were undertaken which successfully engaged residents in the planning and delivery of local events.

2.3.9 The Government through its Big Society agenda is also keen to empower local residents to come together and organise themselves. There are some examples in the borough where residents have come together and managed the delivery of events with minimal input from the Council. Our experience however shows that in areas where cohesion levels are low this can require significant input from the Council both financial and practical, for example with planning, managing logistics, health and safety etc.

#### 2.3.10 Support for new arrivals

The young people interviewed as part of the review recommended the development of a cultural orientation programme for new arrivals. The integration of new arrivals in the borough is recognised as an important strand of the cohesion action plan. The Council has been addressing this issue through the development of activities such as the Welcome Guide, Somali Interagency Task force and New Arrivals Task Force. The Welcome Guide (Appendix 3) aimed to provide a signposting tool for new arrivals that would assist them in accessing essential support services through the use of a visual guide. Over 15,000 copies were distributed in schools, libraries, children's centres, voluntary groups etc. These leaflets have been very positively received by both professionals and members of the community.

2.3.11 A second example of support in this area is the formation of the Somali Interagency Task Force that was set up in 2007 to address the needs of the Somali community. By bringing together agencies such as the Police, Council, Health, Education and the voluntary sector it has been successful in bringing about a significant change in the way that agencies have responded to the needs of the community. This successful model of cross-agency working has now evolved to become the New Arrivals Task Force which aims to replicate the approach used to address the needs of other 'new' communities including the Afghan and Tamil communities.

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

2.4.1 In a difficult financial climate where fewer resources are available to support these types of initiatives it is more important than ever that cohesion considerations underpin local decision-making. It is important that statutory bodies continue to understand their role in fostering cohesion and understand the impact of decisions that are taken about how resources are allocated could affect cohesion levels.

2.4.2 As recognised by the Sustainability Review cohesion levels can be affected in times of economic hardship. The Council will continue to monitor cohesion levels and put in place proactive strategies to counter negative activity as it is identified. Community tension reports and hate crime levels will be monitored through CCMG and will also be reported to the economic recession busting group.

## **2.5 Implications of the Recommendation**

### **2.6 Equalities impact**

The definition of cohesion and integration offered by the Institute of Cohesion and Integration identifies that equality of access is a contributory factor for cohesion. The cohesion action plan identifies a number of activities aimed at improving equality of access for disadvantaged groups.

### **2.7 Community safety**

Community cohesion and community safety are two inter-dependent factors for community sustainability. A rise in crime or fear of crime will have an equivalent impact on cohesion levels in the local area. The development of the action plan which brings together activity across a number of agencies and Council departments recognises the mutuality of these factors.

## **2.8 Financial Implications**

2.8.1 The community cohesion action plan brings together existing activity that is currently funded. The action plan does not include any new initiatives therefore there is no additional impact on the Council's current or future budget.

## **2.9 Performance Issues**

2.9.1 The LAA national indicator NI 1 'that people from different backgrounds get on well together' was used to measure community cohesion levels in the borough. With the removal of the LAA national indicator set other measures for cohesion have been identified including community tension monitoring and hate crime reporting levels. The Council will continue to ask the question 'how well people from different backgrounds get on together' in the reputation tracker and residents panel survey.

## **2.10 Environmental Impact**

2.10.1 The definition of a cohesive and integrated society (Appendix 2) is one where there is a clearly defined and shared sense of the contribution of different individuals and different communities to a future vision for a neighbourhood, city, region or country. The result of this is also likely to be a shared sense of responsibility for the local environment. Some of the activities contained within the action plan such as the Neighbourhood Champions scheme are primarily concerned with the environment but the scheme is also likely to make a significant contribution to community sustainability.

## **2.11 Risk Management Implications**

Risk included on Directorate risk register? Yes

The Community and Environment directorate risk register identifies the risk that community cohesion levels in the borough could deteriorate. The delivery of the community cohesion action plan is one of the actions identified to mitigate against this risk.

Separate risk register in place? No

## **2.12 Corporate Priorities**

2.12.1 The actions taken to address the recommendations of the Sustainability Review regarding community sustainability support the delivery of the Council's vision 'Working together our Harrow our community' and the corporate priority 'United and involved communities – a Council that listens and leads'.

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

None required for this report.

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

**Contact:** Kashmir Takhar, Head of Service Community Development,  
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### **Background Papers:**

Appendix 1: Community cohesion action plan  
Appendix 2: Definition of integration and cohesion  
Appendix 3: Welcome Guide