

## Minutes

### RESIDENTS' AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

22 September 2010

Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre,  
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



	<p><b>Committee Members Present:</b> Councillors Mike Markham (Chairman), Shirley Harper-O'Neill (Vice-Chairman), Lynne Allen (Labour Lead), Judy Kelly, June Nelson and Susan O'Brien.</p> <p><b>Witnesses Present:</b> Joanne Kingham – UKBA Shabeg Nagra – Heathrow Port Health Manager Viv Pullha - UKBA</p> <p><b>LBH Officers Present:</b> Natasha Dogra – Democratic Services</p> <p><b>Also Present:</b> Jack Griffin, Uxbridge Gazette</p>	
1.	<p><b>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b> (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies had been received from Cllr Duncan and Cllr Allen substituted.</p>	Action by
2.	<p><b>DECLARATION OF INTEREST IN MATTERS COMING BEFORE THIS MEETING</b> (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>None.</p>	Action by
3.	<p><b>TO CONFIRM THAT ALL ITEMS MARKED PART 1 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PUBLIC AND THAT ANY ITEMS MARKED PART 2 WILL BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE</b> (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>It was confirmed that all items on the agenda would be considered in public.</p>	Action by
4.	<p><b>TO AGREE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 JULY 2010</b> (<i>Agenda Item 4</i>)</p> <p>The minutes of 27 July 2010 were agreed as an accurate record.</p>	Action by
5.	<p><b>REVIEW 1: WHAT PROBLEMS ARE POSED TO HILLINGDON, AND BEYOND, BY THE LEGAL HIGH KAT AND WHAT CAN WE DO TO TACKLE THEM?</b> (<i>Agenda Item 5</i>)</p> <p>The Chairman invited Officers to update Members on progress made since the last meeting. Officers informed the Committee that letters had</p>	Action by

been sent to Local Authorities across the country asking for their views on Khat; whether Khat was a problem in their boroughs. The London Boroughs of Islington, Richmond, Hounslow and Brent had replied saying Khat was not a major issue in their areas. Wider ranging areas such as Cardiff, Kent, Sheffield and Bolton had replied saying Khat was a problem in their areas. This had led to the formation of Khat Task Groups, Khat awareness training and Khat Working Groups for Somalis.

Having contacted the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Officers had been informed that Khat was not classified as a food as it was not swallowed and has no nutritional value. It had been likened to chewing tobacco. However, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) informed Officers that Khat was not classified as a plant. Therefore, without being classified Khat had no legislation enforced on it.

Officers informed Members that Khat was grown in Yemen, Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda and maybe Israel. Khat was harvested for 5 to 7 years in forests and then imported to countries such as Spain, Holland and the UK. 8 tonnes of Khat were imported to Heathrow Airport 5 times a week, from Kenya and Somalia predominately.

Khat arrived at Heathrow Airport in large boxes with the initials of those who had ordered it. It is unloaded from the plane and transported into the Transit Shed where it is kept as an unopened box until someone collected it. An "Arranger" collected the consignment after paying VAT on each box. On average each box had a street value of £35 (17.5% of which amounted to £6.13 which is the VAT paid on each box). VAT collected from Khat amounted to £2 million per annum. Arrangers paid in cash and had temporary VAT numbers which were easy to organise and difficult to trace. This was paid to the Agent at Heathrow who was responsible for freight that day. Agents changed on a daily basis. After the VAT was paid the consignment was released to the Arranger. The Arranger would then take the boxes and distribute the Khat amongst those who had ordered it. This transaction would take place in areas around Heathrow such as old warehouses. The Khat would then be further distributed and sold to Khat users in cafes, Khat houses and Convenience Stores.

Witnesses informed the Committee that Khat was imported as a plant. Therefore no food legislations were attached to it. In 2009 6 Khat consignments were checked by the UK Border Agency for pesticides, bacteriological evidence and salmonella. 3 consignments were infected. Nevertheless all consignments had to be released to the Arranger, as Khat was not classified as an illegal substance and therefore no legislation could be enforced. Consignments were not opened, and only scanned for radioactive material.

Witnesses said if Khat was to be reclassified as food there could be tighter controls over the importation as it would have to meet FSA standards. However, it was made clear that this decision would have to come from central Government and be uniformly accepted by all agencies (such as FSA, DEFRA and UKBA).

Members queried whether other airports in the UK were receiving Khat consignments. Officers were instructed to investigate this.

The Committee made Officers aware of the various different forms Khat was now available in. Khat tea, Khat tablets, Khat alcohol and Khat sweets were now available to buy online. Officers were instructed to investigate this further. Officers informed the Committee that breaking Khat down to consume it in an alcoholic or pill form was a serious offence, according to Misuse of Drugs Acts. The Act stated that using Khat to make alcohol or tablets was illegal, and the substance formed would be classed as a Class C drug, based on the levels of the two drugs in Khat used to make the substance. Officers were instructed to follow this up with external agencies.

Officers informed the Committee that Khat could not be grown in the UK due to the weather and soil here. Khat could be frozen and consumed at a later date though.

Officers informed Members that UK agencies were working in coalition with US agencies to crack down on the levels of Khat being smuggled into America. A box of Khat which may have had a UK street value of £100 was worth \$26,000 on the streets of the US. Consignments were taken on board flights from the UK as hand luggage and checked in luggage. Khat was easy to disguise and as it was not an illegal substance it could be taken on board. However, Khat could not be taken on board flights to the United States and airlines could be heavily fined if Khat was found aboard a flight bound for the US. Nevertheless, security checks at Heathrow Airport were predominantly focused on checking for security risks.

Officers informed the Committee that since the publishing of the Advisory Council's Misuse of Drugs report in 2005 the number of Khat users had increased significantly. On 15 September 2010 the Home Office launched "The Crazy Scientist" campaign to raise student awareness of legal highs and their side affects. The posters and postcards were to be distributed during University Freshers' Weeks across the UK.

The Committee raised the issue of whether spitting was illegal, as Khat users would chew the leaves and spit out a purple colour spit onto the pavements while chewing Khat.

The Committee asked Officers from UKBA to kindly prepare a briefing paper on VAT from Khat for Members. The Committee also requested information on Khat imported to other UK airports.

The Committee thanked Officers for attending the meeting.

**Resolved:**

**The Committee noted the information from witnesses and officers.**

6.

**REVIEW 2: A REVIEW OF HILLINGDON'S TOWN TWINNING RELATIONSHIPS** (*Agenda Item 6*)

**Action by**

	<p>Members considered the scoping report for the second review to be undertaken by the Committee. The Committee agreed that Town Twinning should be investigated to see whether the current arrangements could be improved to ensure Hillingdon were benefiting from the service.</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b>  <b>The Committee agreed the scoping report. Officers were instructed to begin the review via email.</b></p>	
7.	<p><b>FORWARD PLAN</b> (<i>Agenda Item 7</i>)</p> <p>The Committee noted the Forward Plan.</p>	<b>Action by</b>
8.	<p><b>WORK PROGRAMME 2010</b> (<i>Agenda Item 8</i>)</p> <p>At the request of the Chairman the following Committee meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2010 would begin at 5.45 p.m. with the witness session beginning at 6.00 p.m.</p> <p>The Committee noted the Work Programme.</p>	<b>Action by</b>
<p>The meeting, which commenced at 5.30 pm, closed at 7.15 pm.</p>		

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Natasha Dogra on 01895 277 488. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.