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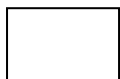
Report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development

Scrutiny Board (City Development)

Date: 18th March 2008

Subject: Consultation on Development Plan Documents

Electoral Wards Affected: All



Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity ☐

Community Cohesion ☐

Narrowing the Gap ☐

1.0 Background

- 1.1 This briefing aims to provide an outline of the way in which Leeds City Council's approach to public consultation when preparing the Aire Valley Action Plan compares to the consultation processes of other local authorities.
- 1.2 The Aire Valley Action Plan is a 'Development Plan Document' (DPD) which forms part of the Leeds 'Local Development Framework' (LDF). Each DPD is formulated following a set procedure and community involvement is encouraged at each stage. However, to simplify matters this summary will look at the consultation processes used overall, rather than looking at each stage of the development of the plan in isolation.
- 1.3 Methods of community involvement for DPDs are set out by most local authorities in a 'Statement of Community Involvement' which also covers consultation methods for ordinary planning applications. Every local authority is required to produce a 'Statement of Community Involvement' (SCI) – which is agreed by the Secretary of State - as part of the conditions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004).
- 1.4 What follows is an outline of the consultation processes set out in the 'Statement of Community Involvement' for each of the core cities and the West Yorkshire authorities. This should provide a benchmark against which LCC policies can be compared. However, it should be remembered that most local authorities vary their consultation procedures in accordance with the nature of the development in question. It should be emphasised also, that the LDF process is still relatively new and practice is still emerging and within this "best practice" still needs to be established. In addition the effectiveness and cost implications of consultation

methods and techniques need to be carefully reviewed. Within this context also, the Government has recently consulted on proposals to 'streamline' the LDF process. Part of this entails combining stages of consultation by having fewer statutory phases. Whilst the proposals to help improve the LDF process are to be broadly welcomed, within the context of overall government requirements, there are inherent tensions between wide scale and extensive consultation and engagement (especially in a city the size and complexity of Leeds) and the need to deliver LDF documents to particular timescales and performance management requirements.

2.0 Who is consulted?

2.1 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004), and the accompanying guidance, sets out a list of bodies which must be consulted when drawing up a DPD. These are:

- The Regional Assembly
- The Regional Development Agency
- Adjoining Local Planning Authorities
- Town and Parish Councils
- Neighbouring Town and Parish Councils
- The Environment Agency
- The Countryside Agency
- The Highways Agency
- Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (English Heritage)
- English Nature
- Network Rail
- Department of Transport
- Relevant Telecommunications Companies
- The Strategic Health Authority
- Relevant Electricity and Gas Companies
- The Water Authority
- Any affected Government Departments, to be consulted via the regional Government Office

2.2 The authority is also recommended to consult

- Local voluntary organisations
- Local interest groups
- Any other organisations or agencies which may be affected
- Councillors
- MPs

2.3 As well as contacting the organisations above, most local authorities involve existing bodies such as Neighbourhood Forums, Area Committees and Local Strategic Partnerships at all stages of the development of a DPD. These are seen as the most effective means of involving Councillors and other community advocates.

2.4 However, it is also recognised that special efforts have to be made to engage with those groups in society which are traditionally 'Hard to Reach'. All the local authorities undertake to tackle this problem, with the majority naming Young People, Disabled People, BME Communities, Older People and Gypsies and Travellers as target groups. Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual people are identified as an additional target group by Bradford, Bristol, Manchester and Nottingham, while Homeless People and Rural Communities are the subjects of particular attention in Bradford and Nottingham. Newcastle is the only authority which specifically undertakes to

consult with Trade Unions, while Bradford is alone in identifying the 'Inactive Majority' and a group which must be engaged with.

3.0 How are they consulted?

- 3.1 As with the list of consultees, there are also certain methods of consultation which are compulsory. These include making any DPD documents available to the public in Council offices, publishing these documents on the Council's website and informing statutory consultees in writing at each stage of the process where consultation is required. In addition, the vast majority of local authorities make use of the following consultation mechanisms:
- Mailshots to interested parties
 - Press releases and contact with the local media
 - Details published in the Council's own newspaper or bulletin
 - Public meetings
 - Exhibitions
 - Focus Groups
 - Questionnaires
 - Leaflets and Posters
- 3.2 There are also a number of other consultation methods which have been adopted by some authorities, despite being less widely used. These are:
- Joint consultation with other Council Departments – *Bradford, Manchester, Sheffield*
 - Internet forums/discussion groups – *Calderdale, Manchester*
 - Telephone hotlines – *Kirklees, Liverpool*
 - Text messaging – *Newcastle*
 - Virtual Reality displays – *Newcastle*
 - Consultation with a 'People's Forum' or 'Citizen's Jury' of local people who represent the community without having an official role – *Kirklees, Newcastle*
 - Art Events – *Birmingham*
 - "Planning for Real" (an interactive system of engagement using a scale model of the area) – *Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield*
- 3.3 There is a recognition amongst all local authorities that any type of consultation, whether it is a leaflet or a community event, should be as accessible as possible to all parts of the community. For example, DPD documents are made available in accessible buildings and can be translated into Braille or a community language on request.
- 3.4 However, certain techniques are also used specifically to target key 'Hard to Reach' groups. As can be seen above, some local authorities are making use of new technologies, such as text messaging and the internet, to engage younger residents and those people who may not have the time or inclination to attend more traditional consultation events. The cost and effectiveness of such methods however are yet to be fully assessed.
- 3.5 Where events and exhibitions are used, they are often targeted at specific groups, such as young people or members of the BME community. Some authorities (such as Wakefield and Bristol) also have specific 'Local Planning Partnerships' which are established in communities with a high proportion of 'Hard to Reach' people in the community. These partnerships exist to involve local people in all aspects of the planning process, and can therefore be used as a forum for consultation on DPDs.

- 3.6 In addition, many authorities make use of bodies set up to represent particular groups in the community and engage directly with them on planning issues. For example, Birmingham City Council routinely takes major planning documents to the city's 'Young People's Focus Group' to gather their views.
- 3.7 Finally, several local authorities, including Bradford, Kirklees, Liverpool and Nottingham encourage their communities to make use of the services of 'Planning Aid'. This is an independent organisation, with nine regional outposts, which offers planning advice to community groups and other bodies which are not in a position to deal with a professional planning consultant. 'Planning Aid' can provide advice on the planning process and also host training events which are specifically designed to help disadvantaged communities get to grips with development issues. Several local authorities work in partnership with 'Planning Aid' and also promote their services at all consultation events. On this point it should be noted that the City Council has worked closely with Planning Aid in the preparation of the Leeds LDF.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 Clearly the legislation surrounding the production of 'Local Development Frameworks' and DPDs is such that there are many similarities in the ways that different local authorities carry out this type of consultation. However, there are also some significant variations. In particular, some authorities have made much more use of innovative consultation techniques such as internet forums and art events (subject to a full assessment of effectiveness and appraisal of costs) these may provide a model for Leeds in the future.