

Report of the South East Area Leader

Report to: Inner South Community Committee

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For decision

Community Committees – delivering the community committee approach in Inner South and setting minimum conditions for delegated decision-making

Purpose of report

1. This report sets the scene for your new community committee and asks approval of a set of minimum conditions for any decisions that may need to be delegated, or taken, between formal community committee meetings.

Giving voice to the community

2. Our city and its communities are facing massive and increasing social and financial challenges, including health inequalities, an ageing and more diverse population, and poverty and financial exclusion. In a time of dwindling budgets but increasing challenges, the council must work more intelligently and more flexibly than ever before. Learning from our experience of the former Area Committees the new arrangements for community committees and community engagement represent a new step towards a more inclusive, more responsive and smarter approach to decision-making in local areas. Community committees offer the opportunity to look afresh at our understanding of local needs, aspirations and potential. The challenge and focus for the new community committees will be to genuinely involve the communities they represent in the decisions that affect them.
3. The new community committees will all develop under a common framework of principles that allow enough flexibility to ensure they operate in the best way suited to them and their local communities. Community Committees will:
 - a. have a clear focus on engaging local communities over local topics of interest;
 - b. only take written reports that have a local significance;

- c. make recommendations to the council's executive board and challenge our partners and others as necessary to secure local improvements;
 - d. consider recruiting non-voting co-optees from the locality to help with the committees' work;
 - e. forge strong links with any local Town and Parish Councils; and
 - f. develop a new approach to localised budget setting over the course of this year.
4. The strengthened focus on engagement encourages elected councillors and officers to think creatively about the best ways to involve local residents and to hear their voices. This represents an opportunity to keep the more formal decision-making to a minimum and devote more time and energy to engagement activities that will be branded as 'Citizens@....' More engagement activities also present further opportunities to raise awareness of the work of the community committees in local areas. An engagement plan will be developed by each community committee which will enable it to focus on a small number of areas of specific concern to the locality.
 5. Improving communications will be important to successfully engage with local residents and will include the development of:
 - a. a new brand for community committees as illustrated by the header to this report, with new agenda front sheets ready for the next meeting;
 - b. new uses of social media including Facebook and Twitter; and
 - c. accessible ways of organising meetings and other engagement activities that promote debate and discussion from all parts of our local communities.
 6. To help these developments a marketing and communications officer is being recruited for a 12-month period. Communications plans will be part of all future community engagement plans.
 7. This is a major opportunity to promote and support civic engagement and enterprise with a local focus, to create opportunities to hear the voices of local people and to set the improvement agenda for the area.

Priorities for Inner South Community Committee 2014 to 2015

8. At the March 2014 Area Committee, Members signed off the completed 2013/14 Area Committee Business Plan Priorities and Actions. This Plan will provide a starting point for the 2014/15 Community Plan which will set out the key priorities for Inner South Community Committee. The Community Plan will consist of a suite of documents that will be available on request and include Ward Profiles and the Priorities and Actions. The Community Plan will outline how Wellbeing funds will be used to improve services to the community, improve local facilities and support community and voluntary groups. It will also detail partnership working, the work of the Community Champions and provide a community engagement plan.
9. Further work will be undertaken with the Community Champions and Service Leads to develop local priorities. Members of the Community Committee are invited to engage with the Community Champion to help inform the plan. Meanwhile, members will be informed by email when all documents are prepared and available.

Delegated decisions

10. Sometimes decisions will need to be made between formal meetings of the community committee and therefore the Area Leaders will have delegated authority from the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities). In order to reassure members that all delegated decisions will be taken within an appropriate governance framework it is proposed that they will only be taken after satisfying the following conditions:
 - a. consultation must be undertaken with all committee/relevant ward members prior to a delegated decision being taken;
 - b. a delegated decision must have support from a majority of the community committee elected members represented on the committee (or in the case of funds delegated by a community committee to individual wards, a majority of the ward councillors); and
 - c. details of any decisions taken under such delegated authority will be reported to the next available community committee meeting for members' information.

Conclusion

11. This is the start of a new commitment to listen to local people, to seek their involvement and engagement with the local civic life of the community. It will provide leadership and promote collaboration to make improvements the community wants. Considerable work has been taking place in each locality to prepare them for the anticipated changes ahead. Much of this is building on the current strengths and recognising the good practice and local structures already in place. The Inner South Community Committee now has the opportunity to shape the way forward for the communities of Beeston, Beeston Hill, Belle Isle, City Centre, Holbeck, Hunslet, Middleton and Stourton.

Recommendations

12. Members are asked to welcome the introduction of Community Committees.
13. Members are asked to approve the minimum conditions set out in paragraph 10 of this report with regard to the need for delegated decisions to be taken between formal community committee meetings.

Background information

- The move to develop community committees followed the Area Review report approved by the council's Executive Board in December 2012 'Review of Area Working Findings and Recommendations'. To view this report [click here](#).
- The Executive Board endorsed the proposed development of community committees at a subsequent meeting in December 2013, 'Citizens@Leeds: Responsive to the Needs of Local Communities'. To view this report [click here](#).
- On 9 June members gave formal approval for community committees at the Council's AGM 'Recommendations of General Purposes Committee' – page 15. To view this [click here](#).