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## Report of the North East Area Manager

### North East (Inner) Area Committee

Date: 25<sup>th</sup> June 2007

### Subject: Community Engagement

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#### Electoral Wards Affected:

Chapel Allerton  
Moortown  
Roundhay

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

#### Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Council  
Function

Delegated Executive  
Function available  
for Call In

Delegated Executive  
Function not available for  
Call In Details set out in the  
report

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## Executive Summary

This report outlines proposals for community engagement and describes how the Area Committee will engage and involve the community and local residents.

## **Purpose of this report**

1. The Area Delivery Plan (ADP) for the North East Inner Area Committee for 2007/08 uses the Local Area Agreement (LAA) to drive its own local priorities and improvement strategies for the area. The LAA provides the opportunity to take community involvement and engagement forward to make sure that it forms an essential part of all plans and strategies. This report outlines proposals for community engagement. Members are asked to consider and comment on these proposals.

## **Background**

2. Within the ADP there is a commitment to empower local people to have a greater voice and influence over local decision making and delivery of services and to build the role of the voluntary, community and faith sectors. This priority is integral to the objectives of the Area Committee to;
  - enhance both the representative role of local elected councillors and the connections with their communities;
  - improve the quality of democracy and find new ways to facilitate citizen participation in local government.

## **Empowering local people – community engagement**

3. Since Area Committees were established in 2004 the North East Inner Area Committee has engaged with local people through regular forum meetings and occasional 'planning ahead' events. The Area Management Team has undertaken a review of these current arrangements. This report proposes a practical framework for engagement for the Area Committee to ensure that it engages with communities in a way that is coordinated, consistent and coherent.
4. Community forums enhance the representative role of local councillors and are a contact point for citizens to express their views and concerns about issues that affect them. They are also a useful link between partner agencies and local people. The review suggests however that existing forums have not been particularly effective in terms of encouraging wider participation therefore provide only a limited and unrepresentative perspective. Attendees are likely to be very small numbers and are therefore unable to represent the views of the whole community.
5. Nobody wants to spend their spare time at dull, bureaucratic meetings or completing long-winded questionnaires! There is likely to be greater interest and participation by devising innovative and even entertaining means of engaging.

6. The Area Management Team, under the leadership of ward members, have experimented with different and innovative techniques of engagement, such as eye-catching publicity and market-place style events where services and community groups can provide a wide- range of information, exhibits and presentations while giving local people the opportunity to comment. There have also been attempts to involve community groups in the planning of the events. These events have had greater turn-out and feedback which indicates that local people feel this is an effective way of obtaining a wide range of information, allowing them to choose what interests them. Local residents still feel engaged in the democratic process as they have the opportunity to engage with their local councillor. The event is also not prone to being dominated by the most vocal.

### **Corporate context**

7. The Government has placed statutory obligations on local authorities, public agencies and local strategic partnerships to engage with communities about issues that affect them. Public involvement is at the heart of changes in public services ranging from local government to the NHS. Funding streams all emphasise the need for social inclusion, community involvement and partnership. The challenge is how to do this in an informed way that is both effective and credible, and does not result in duplication or over consultation.
8. Therefore it is crucial that the Area Committee engages in a meaningful way with local people. The Local Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' includes a number of proposals to strengthen the ability of councillors to act as champions for their community and, importantly, to give local people a more powerful voice to question decisions taken by their council.
9. The paper proposes that central government will guarantee minimum standards and set overall national goals, but it will give local authorities greater freedom and flexibility to meet the needs of local communities and address a range of new challenges, including economic growth, climate change, community cohesion, and social exclusion. In return, local authorities will be expected to provide: greater accountability to local citizens; stronger local leadership; better and more efficient services; and tougher intervention when problems occur. Local people and communities will be given more power and influence over the services that they receive and how public funds are spent.
10. In addition, it suggests a set of indicators on citizen satisfaction with Council services. Under the existing LAA agreement in Leeds there is a mandatory target that measures residents' perception of public sector service improvements and their ability to influence service changes. The Audit Commission assessment of the Council will place a greater emphasis on satisfaction indicators in its inspections and whether residents think services are improving.
11. Meaningful community engagement requires a great deal of effort and can be time and resource intensive. There are many benefits that can be gained however by local organisations and citizens from active engagement. By listening to and working with the community, it is proposed the Area Committee can achieve the following:
  - Plan and provide suitable and localised services that are tailored to the needs of the community. Community engagement is at the heart of evidence- based policy and practice. It stands to reason that people who live and work in the areas of Inner North East Leeds are best placed to say what affects them and

what is needed to improve their quality of life, and for this to be reflected in the services the council delivers. By defining issues and solving problems together, the public and local services can target resources where they are most needed. This helps the Area Committee to provide services that are more responsive to the needs of local communities (within available resources).

- Empower people to define a vision for their community. People, who belong to particular communities or live and work in particular neighbourhoods, should have the right to influence the future. If people can be involved in defining the vision for their community, it will create a greater sense of community spirit, belonging and pride.
- Help the public to gain an understanding of the City Council's policies or priorities through sharing information. It also helps to manage expectations and seeks to explain what can and cannot be achieved, why something is or is not done and what constraints exist.
- Monitor and measure performance. In an ever-increasing culture of performance management, engagement and consultation through surveys are effective ways of establishing base-line data for performance management that can be used to measure service user and public satisfaction.
- Encourage local people to become actively involved in the democratic process. One likely effect of enhancing community engagement is the reinvigoration of local democratic processes and a reversal of the declining trends in voter turnout for both general and local elections.
- If communities are encouraged to play a significant role in improving their neighbourhood, or in planning and developing a project or initiative, they are more likely to develop a sense of responsibility or ownership towards it. This will strengthen the role of the community on the management of their neighbourhoods.
- Improve relationship between partner agencies and the public. Engagement makes services more open and accessible to the public. By making public services more responsive to the needs of the public, we are able to build on and improve that relationship.

### **Inner North East Leeds – existing arrangements**

12. The existing arrangements for community engagement vary across the area. In Chapel Allerton ward there have been three community forums meeting three times per year, giving a total of nine events each year. The forums cover Meanwood, Chapeltown and Chapel Allerton village. In Roundhay ward, forums have been arranged on an ad-hoc basis targeting particular neighbourhoods. In the last year in total Roundhay has received 3 forums. In Moortown ward there has been one planning ahead event since 2005.
13. In Chapeltown, the IMPaCT partnership provides an additional resource for community engagement. £34,500 SSCF funding has been awarded to the 'Imbedding the Impact' project which proposes a co-ordinated package of activities which will engage residents in the neighbourhood improvement programme and

increase local participation in governance in the area. Further details of what will be implemented is contained in the next section.

### **Inner North East Leeds – proposed arrangements**

14. Successful engagement requires investment in terms of time and resources, both in the capacity of the Area Management Team to deliver and the communities to ensure maximum participation.
15. The Area Committee has already agreed the Area Delivery Plan, which identifies that there will be three community engagement events per ward per year. During May, officers have consulted with individual ward members through the regular ward meetings to discuss in more detail how these events might work. In order to manage the additional resource input that is required for community engagement events, members have been asked to consider a timetable across the year. In this way the Area Management Team can manage the additional workload spread across the year.
16. An indicative timetable is suggested below. Final dates will be locally determined in consultation with local ward members;
  - **Autumn.** Engagement activities should be an integral part of the service planning process so that results can be fed directly into decisions about service provision. This forum will provide an opportunity for local residents to identify local priorities and help shape the Area Delivery Plan. By defining issues and solving problems together, the public and local services can target resources where they are most needed. This helps the Area Committee Council to provide services that are more responsive to the needs of local communities (within available resources)
  - **Winter.** Volunteer Thank You Event at the Civic Hall.
  - **Spring.** To encourage residents to get involved in the decisions the Area Committee makes about their communities, this forum will be an opportunity for residents to comment on the appropriateness of services.
  - **Summer.** This forum can be an opportunity for a summer festival - style event. It will provide an opportunity to ask “how are we doing?” and at the same time be a celebration of what has been achieved.
17. Appendix 1 provides detailed information on the different types of engagement event that members might wish to use for their ward events. Officers will talk members through these choices at ward member meetings to aid members in deciding what format would best suit their particular ward. New and emerging community engagement techniques will be added to the database throughout the year and members will be kept updated.
18. In Chapel Allerton ward, residents of Chapeltown will also benefit from the SSCF funding ‘Imbedding the Impact’ project. This project consists of a programme of inter-related activities including the establishment of a Residents’ Network based on the successful model developed by re’new in East Leeds but taking account of the specific characteristics of the IMPaCT area and in partnership with existing groups including the Chapeltown Residents Association. Part of this project will be to introduce a direct feedback mechanism through issuing network members with ‘log books’ for issues that can be torn out and posted free for services to deal with.

Archway are the lead organisation for this project and further information on the project is available from the IMPaCT office.

19. The Area Committee is requested to consider this engagement strategy as a framework for delivering meaningful and effective engagement in 2007/08.

### **Recommendations**

20. The Area Committee is requested to comment on and approve the community engagement framework for 2007/08.