



Report of the Director of Environment & Neighbourhoods Directorate

South Leeds (Outer) Area Committee

Date: Monday 25th February 2008

Subject: Community Engagement

Electoral Wards Affected:
 Ardsley and Robin Hood
 Morley North
 Morley South
 Rothwell

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

Executive Summary

This report outlines proposals for new participative community engagement events for each Ward to enable local residents and groups to 'have their say' on issues of concern and to help shape future Area Committee plans.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 This report proposes changes to the way in which community consultation is undertaken on behalf of the Area Committees in South Leeds. It advocates a clearer process which seeks to address the specific needs of local communities with the most pressing issues and more general opportunities to consult on wider partnership or planning issues. The report is driven by the need to develop an equitable, effective and targeted approach to consultation, within the operational constraints of the area management service. As such it relates to both inner and outer South Leeds area committee areas.
- 1.2 It also needs to be considered in the context of the wide range of functions undertaken by Area Management Teams. The approach to and extent of engagement needs to be proportionate to the benefits which could be achieved, and determined in the light of loss of time allocated to other activities.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 Both at a local and national governmental level there is an increasing expectation that local authorities and other public service providers will consult and engage with local residents, as a means of informing local residents of the work that those bodies undertake, but perhaps more importantly as a means to ensure that services meet residents' needs, are fit for purpose and are delivered efficiently in a manner that is acceptable and useable to residents.
- 2.2 The notion of customer choice is increasingly being applied to public services, and hence if those services are to continue to be delivered by public sector bodies, they need to be tuned into residents' opinions and the points that they value. For many, such consultation and engagement is self-evidently a good thing. Certainly research tends to suggest that those local Authorities which actively engage with residents are perceived by local people as performing better than those authorities which place less emphasis on such activity.
- 2.3 This expectation will be reflected in various governmental monitoring regimes, for example Community Engagement will take an even higher prominence in the new national performance management of Local Authorities under the proposed Comprehensive Area Assessments as compared to the existing Comprehensive Performance Assessment.
- 2.4 Engagement activity can take many forms; at one extreme it may only involve informing local people what is happening, at the other extreme it could involve letting local people decide what needs doing and how it should be done. Particular forms of engagement will be appropriate to particular circumstances but consultation always needs to be purposeful for both for the local authority and residents; each wants to know what they will get from their investment of time and resource.
- 2.5 Within the South Leeds area a wide range of engagement mechanisms are deployed. The extent of which tends to vary by area, partly on the basis of particular need and partly on the basis of history; for example the most extensive engagement mechanisms take place within Beeston Hill and Holbeck, and were developed in response to the SRB programme starting in 1997 and the designation of the area as a Neighbourhood Renewal Priority area.
- 2.6 Presently the following methods of engagement are being utilised:
- Varying degrees of support to a range of community forums in BHH Neighbourhood Renewal Area, and support given to the overarching Neighbourhood Renewal Residents Group.
 - Attendance at various tenants and residents groups as time allows and as required.
 - Publicity relating to the Area Committee, the open forum and subsequent area committee newsletters.
 - NIP steering groups and associated resident group development, NIP newsletters, surveys.
 - A Range of specific consultations carried out in relation to particular activity e.g. INM, Regeneration Plans, BHH Strategy, Vision for Leeds consultation, ADP consultation etc.

- Use of website and designated Area Committee email address
- Varying levels of support to specific groups which aides engagement, i.e. In Bloom, Morley Literature Festival etc.
- Town Centre Summits and Partnership meetings in Morley and Rothwell, and various forms of town centre publicity
- Support to specific residents and neighbourhoods through the NIPs and facilitated by the Priority Neighbourhood Worker
- Participatory budgeting project in Morley

2.7 The September Outer Area Committee received a report outlining the draft model of a Ward Forum as a way forward to assist the Area Committee to fulfill its role in ensuring the council is engaging with all sectors of the community. The proposed method of consultation outlined under 3.0 offer a more informal format to a ward forum but with the same principle of wider community engagement and a vehicle for communication between the Council and the residents.

3.0 Proposals

3.1 Despite the level of activity indicated above, there are obvious inequities in the approach to engagement, with some areas having very few opportunities for engagement facilitated by the Area Management Team or other partners.

3.2 It is proposed to address this by offering a minimum level of engagement activity for each ward, supplemented where needed by additional activity with specific service planning or delivery outputs.

3.3 It is proposed that as a minimum in each ward two consultation events take place each year. The content of these events will be discussed and agreed with local ward members, but it is suggested that they should relate to some form of area committee planning, for example working up the ward based priorities for inclusion in the Committees Area Delivery Plan, focusing on particular ADP themes, or perhaps consulting the public on service delivery within a specific locality.

3.4 It is proposed that these events should seek to utilise innovative and imaginative methodologies for example, planning for real, public service market places, 'face the people sessions', area debates, and be inclusive of relevant council services and external partners etc.

3.5 In addition these events will be supplemented by other processes as specifically required. Whilst not conclusive, these events would need to include, as examples,

- Neighbourhood renewal residents forum in BHH in view of the forthcoming PFI scheme, and determining how to ensure that the existing forums become self sustainable.
- Morley & Rothwell Summits and Town Centre Partnerships
- NIP events
- Specific events in relation to the work of the BHH and Middleton Regeneration boards.
- Changes to the ways in which we use the Area Committee for engagement purposes (see separate report on partnership working elsewhere on this agenda)

- Better use of electronic communication

3.6 It is proposed that on an annual basis the Area Committee will receive a report analysing the extent of community engagement activity and the effectiveness of such activity, this will allow the committee to forward plan the forthcoming years programme of engagement. This report will form the basis of the Committee expected annual submission to the Executive Board on the issue of community engagement.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy and Governance

4.1 Under proposals placed before the Executive Board it is intended that Area Committees will have a more central role in overseeing the extent of community engagement within their area. This report proposes ways in which this could be undertaken in a more structured, equitable and effective manner than at present. It will be incumbent on the Committee and the Area Management Team to ensure that residents fully understand the context in which they are participating in the consultation, i.e. what scope for influence exists for them and for the Area Committee over the issues discussed and what the likely outcomes will be from the consultation.

5.0 Legal and Resource Implications

5.1 Further detail will have to be scoped to determine the full extent of ward based consultation. However this report seeks to clarify the extent of engagement activity that is operationally viable without unduly prejudicing other forms of important activity. As such it does not present any additional resource implications, subject to continuation of the Priority Neighbourhood Development Worker Project.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 The Area Committee is asked to consider this report and give in principle support to the proposal to deliver two specific community engagement events per ward per year.

6.2 The Area Committee is invited to request a proposed schedule of consultation events for the coming year based on the model outlined.