



**Report of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods**

**Outer East Area Committee**

**Date: 8<sup>th</sup> July 2008**

**Subject: A Possible New Approach to Community Engagement**

**Electoral Wards Affected:**  
**Cross Gates and Whinmoor**  
**Garforth and Swillington**  
**Temple Newsam**  
**Kippax and Methley**

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

**1.0 Purpose Of This Report**

- 1.1 This report suggests changes to the way in which community consultation is undertaken on behalf of the Area Committee. It advocates an approach 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.
- 1.2 The report 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 issues 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 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. Additionally the forthcoming empowerment white paper is widely expected to 'beef up' the requirements placed upon local authorities to consult and engage with their communities.
- 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 Outer East Leeds has a long track record of using forums as one of the main ways to promote consultation and engagement. Other methods for engagement include:
- Attendance at various tenants and residents groups or Parish Council meetings as time allows and as required.
  - Consultation through the Garforth Today website.
  - Consultations carried out in relation to specific schemes such as Town and District Centres, ADP consultation etc.
  - Varying levels of support to specific groups and events which aides engagement, i.e. Halton Moor & Osmondthorpe Gala, In Bloom Groups etc.
  - The annual Older peoples week with one event in each ward to celebrate the contribution of older people to their communities

### **3.0 Proposals**

- 3.1 Despite the level of activity indicated above, the effectiveness of the approach can at times be mixed. And whilst the main means of engagement is through forums there is an inequity in the number of forums held within the different wards.
- 3.2 As an attempt to:
- a) balance the amount of time spent on engagement with time spent on other forms of work,
  - b) ensuring engagement is as productive as possible, and
  - c) to achieve a degree of equity across the area,

It is proposed that each ward is subject to an agreed minimum level of engagement activity, supplemented, where needed, by additional activity with specific delivery outputs.

- 3.3 It is proposed that as a minimum, two major consultation events take place each year, in each ward. The content of these events will be determined by 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 specific themes, or perhaps consulting on service delivery within a agreed locality or some other form of topical local issue, such as a local regeneration initiative.

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', or 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 could include, as examples,

- 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, including Garforth Today, and email databases, or possible neighbourhood based improvement planning activity.
- A Participatory Budgeting Event (as referred to in the PB report tabled today)

3.6 Should the area committee decide that it would prefer to adopt this approach to engagement, then it will be necessary to withdraw from the support given to forums. If there is a desire from ward members and members of the public that attend the forums to see some or all of them continue, without the Area Teams direct input, then it would be possible to work with them to promote sustainability and offer some basic support such as photocopying and distribution of minutes, etc.

3.7 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 Committees 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 structured, equitable and effective manner. 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 determined 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 future clarification of the ongoing roles of the Neighbourhood Priority Workers and the Town Centre Manager.

## **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 additional consultation events which will be offered in the Area for the forthcoming year.