



To: North Area Committee
Report by: Head of Corporate Strategy
Scrutiny committee: NORTH AREA COMMITTEE 27 January 2011
Wards affected: North Area

Community Empowerment and Local Participation in Decision Making

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Council wants to extend the participation and involvement of residents in its decision-making, increasing their influence over what happens locally. This forms a prominent part of the Council's vision for strengthening community life in the City. Area Committees, where the Council has brought its decision-making into local communities, will provide a basis for developing forums that are welcoming and allow people greater opportunity to get involved and explore solutions to problems.
- 1.2 North Area Committee has been selected as a pilot to try out new ways of working that will encourage the engagement of local people and allow a wider range of decisions to be taken locally. This new approach was discussed in the Council's Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 17 January 2011. Please read the report in Appendix 1, which sets out some of the background, learning from other local authorities that could be applied and approaches that have an emphasis on working in partnership that the pilot can test. The pilot will be for a year, starting from 1 April 2011.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to ask members of the committee to agree how they will run the pilot and the approaches they wish to try out.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Area Committee is asked to:

- a) Agree to move regulatory decisions (planning applications) to separate sub-meetings. This will require additional meetings to be arranged (3.2).
- b) Agree the approaches to engagement that it wishes to test in the pilot, that it feels will extend participation, and the timing of meetings to involve interest groups (3.11).
- c) Agree a name for the pilot that will promote interest (3.1).

3. Background

3.1 North Area Committee has complete discretion to choose the forms of engagement that members feel will improve participation, within the framework agreed by Strategy and Resources. The main point will be to get away from the traditional committee based approach for non-regulatory matters, where councillors sit around a table debating issues in front of an audience, who mainly sit and listen. It is suggested that a new name for the Area Committee is taken up, such as Community Forum or Area Forum to promote this new approach.

3.2 To give the pilot more capacity to do things differently it is proposed that the formal regulatory part of meetings, where planning applications are considered, is split out into 6 separate sub-meetings. Members will need to agree six additional meetings to consider regulatory matters.

3.3 The present cycle of planned meetings, which are scheduled to start at 7.30 pm, during the pilot is:

19 May (2011), 14 July, 22 September (2011), 24 November (2011), 26 January (2012) and 22 March (2012).

3.4 These meetings could be scheduled to run at different times of the day and be placed in a range of other settings, such as

the Meadows Community Centre, Brown's Field or Arbury Community Centres, to give a fresh feel and to try out new approaches. It is important that the approaches to these meetings are agreed at an early point to allow awareness of them to be raised and promotion to take place in communities.

- 3.5 It is suggested that a community workshop is staged with local people to agree a vision and priorities for the area. These will then be captured in a Local Community Plan that will inform the content of future meetings or events and allow for review towards the end of the pilot. The workshop could be structured around a number of themes such as local policing priorities, environmental issues, young people etc. and will be, hopefully, characterised by the energy of participants and a common ownership of the issues identified. Members may wish to consider holding the workshop at a weekend, to make it easier for local people to attend.
- 3.6 The agendas of future meetings would be shaped by the priorities shown in the Local Community Plan. The aim will be to create a setting in which most people will feel comfortable and free to talk, such as a café approach or interactive voting. It will be important for the Council's partners feel that they can contribute to meetings, so that issues that extend beyond the scope of the local authority can be tackled, but also to stimulate partnership working in the locality.
- 3.7 The café approach can hopefully bring in people who don't normally attend public meetings and provide a more creative atmosphere. Café type events involve people sitting around small tables and are lead by a facilitator who will ask or invite questions. The facilitator can either be a councillor or officer.
- 3.8 The community leadership role of councillors will be promoted in café type events as they will each be sitting around tables, talking to people at their table, but also representing other groups of people not attending. Where decisions are required, members can vote from their respective tables. Active community representatives can be

invited to lead discussions about how they are responding to local need.

- 3.9 Interactive voting approaches allow people to give an instant view, with votes displayed in summary almost immediately, about how they feel about different priorities. This would utilise handsets similar to those used by the Youth Participation Service. One challenge of this approach is to make the subject meaningful and to show at a later stage how the views have been incorporated into policy or action.
- 3.10 The use of “surgeries” on a 1-2-1 basis before meetings has been shown elsewhere to help meetings run more smoothly and provide greater satisfaction for residents, as they can talk freely about their individual issues and do not need to raise them in an open meeting. It is proposed to incorporate surgeries into this new approach. Community Fairs, where local groups get together, have also proven popular ways to improve networking for Area Committees and Forums as they give people a feel for what is available and can attract new volunteers for the groups.
- 3.11 Table 1 in Appendix 2 shows how the new approaches could be distributed across the six meetings. Local people, councillors, partners and officers are invited to propose matters for discussion, in addition to the Council’s own more routine decisions that have featured in previous meetings, that might be relevant to various interest groups. The timing of the meetings should reflect the needs of the group, e.g. young people will require an earlier meeting.
- 3.12 An important aspect of the pilot will be the way it follows up on its agreed actions, coordinating responses within the Council and from partners, and communicates with local people. A senior officer, single point of contact, from the Council will look to make “things happen” and help the Chair shape the content of meetings so that they are interesting as possible. People should enjoy the meetings and want to come again, but also feel they have been listened to and that their problem will be addressed, where possible. An ‘Issues Log’ will be maintained and can be posted on the Area Committee’s web page (see below).

3.13 Of course not everyone can or has the inclination to attend a meeting. Alternative forms of engagement, such as through a dedicated web-page or social networking, will be more attractive to certain groups of people who are familiar with these approaches. A proposal for the use of Facebook or Twitter will be worked up. Members will need to decide whether this is administered from within the Council or from within the community. Members may also want to try 'pairing up' with, say, a youth worker, to go out and engage young people and understand their local issues so that they can be brought back to the area committee meetings.

3.14 A new web-page for the Area Committee has been put in place and can be found here:
<http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/about-the-council/committees/>

This page is a starting point and can be developed as the pilot progresses.

4. Preparations for the pilot's launch

4.1 As the pilot is scheduled to start in April the Area Committee will have a further meeting on 24 March to review preparations for the launch and to develop its programme (forward plan). The knowledge members and non-elected community representatives have about their communities and groups will be crucial in developing the pilot. By the March meeting it will be helpful if both members and participants can:

- Make contact with different groups of people, to encourage involvement in the community workshop, and to get the views of people who are less inclined to participate, so they can be fed in. For example, by visiting elderly people in sheltered housing schemes, young people in youth clubs or BME residents at their own community meetings. We could facilitate this by 'pairing up' some members with a City Council officer, partner officer or community representative who work with specific groups (e.g. a youth worker, sheltered housing officer, community development worker etc.)

- Contribute to an 'area profile' so that it uses existing information from things such as surveys and crime statistics to inform the workshop.
- Suggest issues to include within the workshop and the pilot's programme
- Tell people about the new approaches

5. Devolving Decisions

5.1 Whilst improving people's experience of meetings and giving local people greater influence is a key aim of the pilot, it will be important that the pilot will be able to do more, especially in the priority areas it has identified. For example, officers are presently looking at how greater influence over the way developer's contributions are spent can be given to area committees.

5. Implications

5.1 Environmental

A more participative and devolved approach to decision making presents significant opportunities to encourage and support local people and local groups to become more environmentally aware so that they can help to improve the environmental sustainability of their neighbourhood. The pilot could be used to engage more local people in environmental projects. For example, around energy efficiency.

5.2 Community Safety

This proposal would help to develop a more participative approach to neighbourhood policing and local community safety by bringing partners together with local people and collectively setting local priorities and exploring solutions to problems.

5.3 Equal opportunities

The proposal for the pilot is flexible and inclusive and will enable Members to use different participatory events, depending upon the issues and the local people who are concerned about them.

We are aware that some people are less inclined to attend area committee meetings. For example, young people, BME

communities and people with mobility impairments. Our engagement methods must seek to address this by engaging with them in different ways.

An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out as part of the monitoring process for the pilot.

5.4 Financial, procurement and staffing

The Pilot will be supported by an officer from Strategy and Partnerships working with other officers from Community Development and Committee Services. The pilot will require a proportion of time from a Head of Service or senior officer to give direction in meetings to coordinate meetings and ensure actions are completed. The pilot will also require work from front line officers, depending upon any additional budgets and/or decisions that are devolved.

The Pilot will inform Members about options for the way local services might be delivered for the 2012/13 and 2013/14 portfolio planning and budget processes, should they choose take some of the approaches forward.

No additional resources in terms of basic service delivery or capital expenditure will be re-directed from other area committees to the pilot area.

6. Inspection of papers and contact for information

Background papers can be found at the following link:

- a) Summary of learning from visits to other local authorities in September 2010.
- b) Notes from member workshops in October 2010.

<http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/democracy/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=12994&path=12993>

If you have a query on the report please contact:

7. Appendices:

1. Community Empowerment and Local Participation in Decision Making North Area Pilot: Strategy and Resources Committee, 17 January 2011.
2. What could feature in the Pilot

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Appendix 2.

Table 1. What could feature in the Pilot

When	How and what could feature?
<i>24 March 2011 Area Committee Meeting</i>	<i>Area Committee agrees a communication and engagement plan to inform and publicise the community workshop</i>
<i>19 May 2011 Area Committee Meeting</i>	<i>Member and officer surgeries to be held at the start of meeting for half an hour. Café type meeting. Officers present Area Profile Information and final arrangements for Community Workshop</i>
<i>4 June 2011 (Saturday)</i>	<i>Community Workshop to launch pilot. This will discuss a vision for the area and priorities to be worked on in smaller groups. A community plan to emerge from the event containing priorities that can be looked at in more depth during other meetings. This type of meeting may be better suited to an early-evening or afternoon. Meeting to use interactive voting to help identify priorities – perhaps for neighbourhood policing priorities?</i>
<i>14 July 2011 Area Committee Meeting</i>	<i>Member and officer surgeries to be held at the start of meeting for half an hour. Café type meeting - Discussion about how Workshop went and to agree local community plan.</i>
<i>22 September 2011 Area Committee Meeting</i>	<i>Member and officer surgeries to be held at the start of event for half an hour. Café type meeting to discuss various environmental improvements or ideas for neighbourhood improvements and use of community development grants. Could include community representatives talking about local issues.</i>
<i>24 September 2011 (provisional) (Saturday) Or could be incorporated into the 22 Sept meeting</i>	<i>Community event to review progress against Local Community Plan and to review the participative approach to give people the chance of discussing in small groups how the pilot is going and what can be improved. This will feed into the Council's decisions about how to extend the pilot to other areas.</i>
<i>24 November 2011 Area Committee Meeting</i>	<i>Member and officer surgeries to be held at the start of event for half an hour. Café type meeting to discuss local issues that could perhaps include how GP Commissioning is being developed.</i>
<i>26 January 2012 Area Committee Meeting</i>	<i>Member and officer surgeries to be held at the start of event for half an hour. Café type meeting to discuss local issues that could perhaps include how local community facilities are run.</i>
<i>22 March 2012 Area Committee Meeting</i>	<i>Look for an earlier meeting in the day to involve young people talking about life in the area and problems. Community Fair networking event to help promote community life.</i>
<i>May 2012 (tbc)</i>	<i>Community event to review progress against Local Community Plan and review and agree new priorities. People to be asked to review the success of the pilot. This will inform a final report to Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee making recommendations for more radical changes across all 4 area committees.</i>