Cambridge City Council   **Item**

To:	The Leader
Report by:	Head of Corporate Strategy
Scrutiny committee:	Strategy and Resources 17 January 2011
Wards affected:	All Wards

Community Empowerment and Local Participation in Decision Making North Area Pilot

Key Decision

1. Executive summary

1.1 The Council's vision includes two statements about strengthening local communities and empowering local people in Cambridge:

- A city whose citizens feel they can influence public decision making and are equally keen to pursue individual and community initiatives

- A city which is diverse and tolerant, values activities which bring people together and where everyone feels they have a stake in the community

1.2 On 5th July 2010, following debate at Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, the Leader agreed a proposal to pilot a participatory approach to local decision making in 2011/12 through the north area committee. She directed officers to arrange member workshops in the autumn to shape the pilot and agree the boundaries within which the pilot will operate.

1.3 This report sets out proposals for the North Area Pilot and possible improvements for the area committees that have been informed by visits to other Councils and the member workshops. It explains that the pilot will enable the Council to

carefully test ideas and initiatives before implementing them across the City so we can ensure we have identified and assessed areas of risk and ensured we have the capacity to implement change across the City. The proposals are aimed at setting the Council on a course to:

- Take advantage of the government's localism agenda,
- Align local decisions and local service delivery to the priorities of local communities and, through this process, to strengthen the local communities themselves.
- Achieve the vision statements set out above.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Leader is recommended to:

a) Agree the proposals for the North Area Pilot as set out in Section 6.3 of this report.

b) Agree the proposals that could be implemented across all the area committees before the conclusion of the North Area Pilot, as set out in Section 7.1 of this report.

3. Background

3.1 The Council's vision includes two statements about strengthening local communities and empowering local people in Cambridge:

- A city whose citizens feel they can influence public decision making and are equally keen to pursue individual and community initiatives

- A city which is diverse and tolerant, values activities which bring people together and where everyone feels they have a stake in the community

3.2 The Leader made a decision at Strategy and Resources on 5 July, to develop a Pilot for North Area Committee to trial approaches to increase community empowerment and local participation in decision making.

3.3 The proposals set out in this report are aimed at shaping the pilot and setting the Council on a course to take advantage of the government's localism agenda and achieve the two vision statements set out above. More specifically they seek to deliver the following outcomes:

- Greater participation and involvement by residents in the work of the Council and partners
- Improved local services that are more responsive to the priorities of local people
- A strengthened role for elected members within their local constituencies and opportunities for development

3.4 The proposals assume that there is no additional resource. We will need to use staff time and existing budgets in different ways. They require elected members and officers to think and work very differently. There are some things we can do now and some things that need more detailed planning and testing to ensure that they work and that they are deliverable before being implemented following the pilot.

3.5 The pilot will be set up as a formal project, managed effectively and thoroughly evaluated after a year. An interim evaluation will take place in the autumn of 2011 to inform portfolio plans and budgets for 2012/13.

3.6 A two-staged programme was undertaken to help shape the pilot. The first stage involved discussions with Inspire East about different arrangements to promote empowerment in the region and visits to other local authorities with community engagement structures in place. The second stage involved Workshops with members and partners to review the emerging learning from the visits, consider some officer views for developing delegated services and to look at ways to take the project forward in the Cambridge context.

3.7 The actual drafting of this report has been developed with input from members and officers.

4. Learning from first stage

4.1 The key leaning points from our visits to other authorities were:

4.1.1 **Demonstrate commitment** by giving a senior officer responsibility for each area committee. Their role should be pro-active. They should:
- Work with the Chair to shape agendas and liaise with partners.
- Be given the authority to <u>require</u> other officers from across the Council to follow up actions as necessary.
- Have a breadth of competence to be able to handle items and reports on many different issues at area committee meetings to minimise the need for lots of officers to attend (the 'one Council' approach).

4.1.2 **Change the culture of the Council** so that area working is given a high commitment and ultimately seen as the norm rather than an exception (This will be a significant change for both officers and members).

4.1.3 **Build community capacity** by informing and involving local people and community groups about opportunities for engagement and how they can influence decisions.

4.1.4 **Agree clear priorities for the local area** by engaging with local people to agree a local vision and local community plan that sets out the things that local people, local councillors and partners will seek to achieve by working together.

4.1.5 **Deliver prompt actions** and keep local people informed. One Council followed the approach of "You said, We did, We're working on it" to demonstrate listening and action. These could be issues raised at area committee meetings or issues and actions arising outside of formal meetings. A record of all these issues and actions should be maintained in a record log that should be published.

4.1.6 **Provide positive experiences of engagement** so that local people feel they have been heard and want to return. Ipswich Borough Council has made their area meetings much more informal by placing members in the audience with local residents to reduce any status barriers.

4.1.7 **Don't expect all local people to come to an evening area committee meeting.** Try and match the engagement method to the interest group. For example, younger people may be far more interested in engagement through social networking sites.

4.2 A more detailed summary of the learning from the local authorities visited can be found at this link: http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/democracy/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=12994&path=12993

5. Learning from second stage

5.1 During the member workshops, discussions about how to improve our engagement fell into 3 broad categories:

- What approaches should be tested in the Pilot?
- What can we do now to improve participation in Area Committees?
- How can the City Council shift its resources to enable a greater focus to be placed on area based working.

5.2 The workshops have informed the following sections of this report. A briefing note giving more detail about the workshops can be found at this link: http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/democracy/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=12994&path=12993

6. Scope of the Pilot

6.1 The pilot marks the start of a significant change in the way the Council engages and involves residents in local decision making. Instead of sitting in front of residents and expecting residents to listen whilst councillors debate local issues, the pilot will encourage councillors, their partners and residents to work together to improve their local area.

6.2 The name 'Area Committee' suggests formality. This should be changed to reflect the new way of working.

6.3 It is proposed that the pilot undertakes or 'tests' the following during 2011/12:

a)   *Agree a vision and priorities for the local area – hold a community event or workshop with local people and partners to agree a vision and priorities or key issues for the local area. These priorities could be thematic issues (e.g. related to public realm or young people) or area specific. Councillors, partners and local people to work together to address these issues. Use the vision and priorities to help inform agenda items for the non-regulatory meetings. A follow-up community event should be held after 6 months to review progress and priorities.*

b)   *Hold 6 separate formal regulatory meetings on the current cycle to take local planning decisions. This might be a sub-committee of the north area committee comprising one or two members from each ward. Membership could be rotated to limit the number of meetings members have to attend (a similar model to the Council's Licensing sub-committee).*

c)   *Hold 6 non regulatory meetings on the current cycle. Make the meetings more welcoming and participatory so that people have more positive experiences from their engagement. Trial café style meetings where members sit at tables with residents and partners and debate issues together.*

d)   *Hold a 'surgery' before the start of each non-regulatory meeting where residents can come along and meet on a 1-2-1 basis with ward members to raise issues. Issues to be included on a 'Log of Issues' (see below).*

e)   *Use the Council's Modern Gov committee management system to set up web pages for the pilot. This would link to area profile information, local resident's groups, partner's websites and include the 'Log of Issues' so that people could see when an issue they raised had been dealt with. It could also link to north area Facebook and Twitter pages as these are developed (see below).*

f)   *A Senior Officer will be given responsibility for overseeing area working in the pilot area. Their role will*

be to work with the Chair and partners to agree agendas and ensure that actions to address the 'Log of Issues' are followed up and reported back to local people.

g) *Increase the number and range of decisions taken locally by trialing new areas of devolved work and integrating them with the decisions that are already devolved. The trial should initially focus on:*

- *Improved integration of capital streams to deliver local priorities, including decisions about developer contributions.*
- *Influencing priorities for day to day activities such as some areas of street cleansing*

Officers will continue to investigate other City Council service areas that could be devolved through the pilot, particularly those service areas related to the area vision priorities.

h) *Continue to work with the County Council to explore options for devolving some of their services and encourage them to devolve decisions about services such as local highway schemes.*

i) *Engage local people through 'out reach' to find out the views of people who wouldn't ordinarily attend area committee meetings. For example; by actively engaging in the Arbury Carnival, visiting youth clubs, visiting people in sheltered housing, attending local BME community meetings. This work should help to inform the priorities at (a) above.*

j) *Explore the use Facebook and Twitter to engage people.*

6.4 The resources required to run this pilot include:

- *Part of a Head of Service or Senior Officer's time.*

- *Officer support from Community Development to help engage community groups and local residents.*

- *Officer support from Committee Services. They would need to arrange, support and minute at least 6 additional meetings and maintain the 'Log of Issues'.*

- *Front line officer support. This could be managed to some extent and staff attendance at area committee meetings minimised if a senior officer is nominated as described above and presents reports across a wide range of subjects.*

- *Web design and social media support. Using Modern Gov for the web pages will minimise the need for technical support. The running of Facebook and Twitter accounts would need to be managed but could possibly be handed over to a community group to manage.*

- *More active involvement from partners.*

- *More active involvement from members in Arbury, Kings Hedges, West Chesterton and East Chesterton to attend the additional meetings and participate in the community events and outreach work.*

- *A small budget to fund the 6 extra meetings and the community events (this can be covered for the pilot from the corporate consultation budget).*

- *Staff time within departments to re-configure service processes to accommodate the move to greater area working.*

6.5 We need to be clear how we will measure the success of the trial.

- *Are the experiences of residents who engage with us positive or otherwise?*

- *Do residents feel they can influence local decisions?*

- *Is the pilot delivering its vision and priorities?*

- *Are local issues being followed up and reported back effectively?*

- *Are more people participating?*

- *Are officers across the Council actively engaging?*

- *Are Members actively engaging?*

- *Are partners actively engaging?*

6.6 An interim report will be presented to members in October 2011 with recommendations about what could be implemented across all four areas of the City in 2012 to inform the 2012/13 budget. A more detailed report will be presented to Members in July 2012 at the end of the pilot.

6.7 We need to manage expectations as the work progresses. We need the non-regulatory meetings to be much more participative and to actually feel different to those people attending. To do this we need to allow time on the agendas for people to have their say and to debate issues with members.

6.8 As we engage more people, they will expect us to respond quickly and effectively to address their issues. The learning from officers who have experience of working closely with community groups and residents is that we must be open and honest with people at the outset about what we can do and what we can't do. What we must not do is promise things that we can't deliver.

7. What can be done now within existing Area Committees?

7.1 Members in the workshops recognised that they could start to make some improvements now in the way Area Committees are run rather than waiting for the conclusion of a review of the Pilot. Possible improvements that Members may wish to consider include:

- Improving the experiences of people attending by making (the non-regulatory part of) meetings more welcoming and informal. This could include members sitting with local people instead of in front of them, relaxation of prescriptive speaking rights etc.

- Splitting out the regulatory and participatory elements of the meeting so that meetings have a 'formal' part and an 'informal' part. The two parts could be split by having a tea break. We would need to be mindful of any additional costs for providing alternative venues and/or providing refreshments.

- Using screens in the regulatory part of meetings to project planning applications and/or displaying plans before the meeting starts so that people have more time to look at them and can see them more easily during the debate.

- Nominating a senior officer for each area committee to work with the Chair to shape agendas, present reports and provide high-level 'clout' to ensure things get followed up and sorted out (as proposed for the pilot).

- Chairs could exercise more control over the agenda to free up more time for residents to discuss issues that they say are really important to them.

7.2 In addition to the above officers intend to use Cambridge Matters to regularly promote Area Committees and their work. Officers are also exploring other decisions that could be devolved across all area committees without waiting for the pilot to run its course. These would need to be relatively easy to devolve without the need for major process or constitutional changes.

7.3 Some of the above could have resource implications which would need to be considered. Staff time would have to be re-prioritised accordingly and moving to a more informal set up at meetings may require us to review the venues we currently use.

8   Parallel work required.

8.1   If we are serious about shifting the focus of the organisation away from the centre towards local areas, we need to consider a number of things whilst the pilot is running so that we are prepared to make more radical changes in the future.

8.2   There will be no additional resource within front line or support services to support the process. Many service areas are currently undergoing major reviews and re-structuring whilst managing a full workload. The pilot will be moving forward within the context of this major change and some services may not have the capacity to engage fully until a later stage.

8.3   We will need to move resources that currently support the central decision-making and scrutiny processes. This means reducing the number of central meetings, briefings and reducing the amount of reports that go through them. It means freeing up officer time, both in support services and those front line services where changes are made. This will be a major cultural change for both officers and members and a big challenge for the organisation.

8.4   If we shift more decisions and more budgets to area committees we will need to look at our internal processes. For example, how we manage budgets, how our cost centres are set up, our risk management processes etc. We will need to plan in time for our Accountants and Legal staff to do this work. Our aim must be to simplify process and speed up decision making.

8.5   We need to be clear about the degree of flexibility given to each area committee. The more we devolve decisions and budgets and empower local people, the more likely we are to end up with different outcomes in different areas of the City. This may well be positive if the outcomes are addressing different local priorities across the City but It may also raise issues about inequality if one area, community or group of people is perceived to benefit over another. We will need to have clarity about the city-wide policy framework that sits above area working covering, for example, allocation of resources.

8.6 There may be some decisions that can't be 'tested' during the pilot because they require complex and wholesale changes to the organisation's processes. Work may need to be carried out alongside the pilot so that we are prepared to make the change at a later date.

8.7 We will need to look at the role of Area Committee Chairs, Spokes and members. Should, for example, members' allowances be changed to reflect a greater 'importance' for these roles (and a lesser importance for other roles?). Officers suggest that this report is submitted to the Allowances Panel so that they can consider this issue.

8.8 We need to continue our discussions with partners to encourage them to devolve some of their budgets and decisions and to 'buy in' to a more participatory approach. Initial discussions at officer level with the Police, County Council, Fire and Rescue and Health have been more positive to this approach.

8.9 We need to develop the skills of our officers. This is all about 'One Council'. We need staff who are comfortable fronting discussions about a wide range of issues and who are willing to take responsibility for ensuring actions are followed up and delivered, even if they are not related to their own service area or organisation.

8.10 Members will also need to develop their skills to take account of a more participative approach where residents set local priorities and play an active role in debates and decisions about local service delivery.

8.11 Officers are arranging regular informal meetings with area committee chairs, the Leader and the Executive Councillor for Community Development and Health to help take this work forward.

9. Implications

9.1 **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.

9.2 **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.

9.3 **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.

9.4 **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.

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

10. 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

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