

Area Community Committees and their role in Community Capacity Building at Salford City Council.

Salford City Council has led in the establishment of nine community committees covering the whole city. These are overseen by a local political executive who elect a link member to assume a leadership role for that area on behalf of the council. Community committees cover two or three wards and are composed of the elected members for those wards and representatives of bona fide community groups within the area. Political executive and community committees are supported by:

- An area co-ordinator -a chief or deputy chief officer of a city council directorate who assumes a leadership role in terms of relationships between city council services and the local community.
- A full-time neighbourhood co-ordinator who works closely with the political executive and chair and deputy chair of the community committee to ensure co-ordination and appropriate delivery of services locally.
- A link officers group comprising representatives of each city council directorate and other agencies with a key role to play locally, for example, police, primary care group, churches etc.
- A community team -this comprises workers from the statutory and voluntary sector who have a community brief, for example, community development workers, tenant participation workers, community health workers, voluntary sector, etc.

Community committees have four key functions:

- The development, implementation, monitoring and evaluating of a community action plan for their area. Community action plans have three themes: environmental sustainability; economic development; social inclusion. Key corporate strategies, for example, relating to regeneration, crime reduction and reducing health inequalities are given a local dimension.
- Managing delegated budgets. Each community committee has a delegated budget of £1 per resident in the area matched with similar allocation of SRBS capacity building funding. These delegated budgets are used to facilitate the implementation of the community action plan.
- Community committees have a local scrutiny function, which ties in with best value. Service standards across the city council are being published in the form of a community charter for each household in every community committee area. The community committee will have the right to scrutinise performance against the charter within the city council's best value regime.
- Engaging other public and voluntary sector organisations. Community committee and community action plans are increasingly being accessed by other organisations, particularly in the NHS and the police, as a means of engaging and consulting with local communities in Salford.

The community strategy provides an effective way of bringing together political processes, service delivery and communities within a strategic framework at the local level. As such, it makes the democratic process and the role of elected members more meaningful in the day-to-day life of the community.

Why was the project innovative?

- It's a means by which local councillors, the communities they serve, the city council and large organisations work together for the benefit of citizens at the local level.
- The development of local executives with a councillor assuming the community leadership role brings local government closer to the people.
- Community strategy directly links local decision making with the city council's cabinet, service planning, corporate strategies such as regeneration and crime reduction and resource allocation.
- Community action plans are the basic building block for the local strategic partnership's community plan.
- Local councillors and their communities are empowered through our delegated budgets.
- It provides an innovative framework to enable other statutory and voluntary sector organisations to engage with the communities they serve. Community strategy is ongoing and currently in its second phase of implementation.

What has the project achieved?

A number of significant achievements have been made:

- There is a significantly higher level of public involvement in the local decision-making process within the communities.
- Community action plans have formed a fundamental foundation on which both decisions about regeneration and the way regeneration has been undertaken are shaped.
- By virtue of giving local councillors and community committees a significant scrutiny role, the community strategy has enabled the city council to effectively implement best value in a meaningful way.
- The community strategy has helped us co-ordinate our services in a more effective way. As a consequence, together with other agencies, significant inroads have been made in tackling some of the key issues facing our communities -for example, identifying and responding to the needs of children and young people, developing local action plans as part of our crime reduction strategy and delivering Local Agenda 21 in a way which is valued by our local community.