

Item No: 4	Classification: OPEN	Date: 12 January 2004	Meeting Name: OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Report Title:		Scrutiny: Community Councils	
Ward(s) or Group affected:		All	
From:		Environment & Community Support Scrutiny Sub-Committee	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommend the Executive to consider a wider Member debate on the issues of "strategic fit" as set out in the Inlogov report, and report back to the Committee in March 2004 with firm proposals (for review by Finance & Economic Development Scrutiny Sub-Committee);
2. That Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommend the Executive to consider areas for further delegation to Community Councils, possibly to include traffic calming measures and roads maintenance, and pilot any further delegation in appropriate Community Council areas in 2004/2005;
3. That, to support this, Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommend the Executive to consider delegation of additional capital budgets and of specific revenue budgets in 2004/2005, and make appropriate provisions in the budget;
4. That Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommend that any further delegation exclude the management of Council housing and that the Executive be recommended to confirm their general position on this; and
5. That the Chief Executive provides a report on progress in addressing issues in respect of management of Community Council meetings, resourcing and Officer support (Section 6 of the Inlogov report).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

6. At its meeting on 19 November 2003, the Environment & Community Support Scrutiny Sub-Committee received the initial findings of the Institute of Local Government Studies (Inlogov) review of Community Councils in Southwark (Appendix 1 to this report). Inlogov stressed that Community Councils were generally perceived to be working well but that Southwark was now at a point when it had to address the purpose of the Councils and their fit into other structures and the Council's wider vision and strategies. Representation had to be balanced against participation.

7. On 17 December, the Sub-Committee invited the Deputy Leader of the Council to share her response to the Inlogov report and any views on devolving further powers to Community Councils.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Strategic Fit

8. In their initial response to the Inlogov report, Members raised questions relating to the involvement of young people. Inlogov emphasised that it was essential to consider the purpose of such involvement. It also depended on the purpose of Community Councils, i.e. if they were seen as decentralised meetings of the Council the membership and format was restricted. Consultation on particular issues relating to young people did not necessarily have to take place at Community Councils. The Council needed to be clear as to the function and strategic fit of the Community Councils.
9. The Deputy Leader emphasised that, as part of strategic fit, the link between Community Councils and the Executive and the Scrutiny function needed to be clarified, in order for Community Councils to effectively feed into the other parts of the Council.

Further Delegation to Community Councils

10. The Inlogov report identified planning as an issue that required consideration. Different authorities placed the planning function with different bodies and Councillors held a range of opinions as to where planning issues should be decided. Members of the Sub-Committee felt that the experience of considering planning applications had been different in each Community Council. As Community Councils had only been undertaking this function for six months it was felt that it was difficult to assess what had been achieved but that, ultimately, performance in terms of turn around times of applications and numbers of appeals would be important.
11. Members of the Sub-Committee indicated that discussion should also be held in respect of further delegation of budgets, for example in the field of environmental management. At their meeting on 17 December 2003, Members considered that the Executive should continue the current budgets delegated to Community Councils into 2004, as this had proved very popular and successful. The possibility of extending delegation to include an amount of revenue budget was also discussed and it was agreed that the Executive be recommended to introduce this in appropriate pilot Community Councils.
12. There was also debate as to whether appointment of school governors should be a function of Community Councils.

Management of Council housing

13. In considering the Inlogov report, Members asked for clarification as to any proposals made by Councillors for links to Neighbourhood Forums, other community networks and the voluntary sector (page 29, Inlogov Report). Appendix

1 to the report detailed all comments made but not all these comments were definite proposals. References in the report to devolving housing management to Community Councils reflected one-off suggestions made during the consultation exercise rather than widespread demand. Links to the Local Strategic Partnership, particularly in respect of the community strategy, were more widely raised.

14. The Sub-Committee was concerned that it was widely felt in the community that, at some point, housing management would be devolved to Community Councils. The Deputy Leader was asked to confirm her views on this and she indicated that there was no such proposal. However, the Sub-Committee considered that it was important for the Executive to make a clear statement as to its position on this issue.

Management of Community Council meetings, resourcing and Officer support

15. Members asked Inlogov if there was Officer concern about the number of meetings and related staffing and cost implications. A common issue raised had been the adoption of standard formats of reports so that information requested by several Community Councils could be coordinated, collated and presented in the same way. Members of the Sub-Committee suggested that at some time in the future a debate would be necessary on the creation of Area Managers to coordinate the work of Community Councils.
16. Members of the Sub-Committee also highlighted that it might be necessary to review the terms of reference of the Community Councils to ensure that the range of their work did not become too wide and therefore unmanageable.
17. Paragraph 6.19 of the report addressed training and development for Chairs of Community Councils and Officers. The Sub-Committee considered that this and issues of management of Community Council meetings, resourcing and Officer support should be progressed by the Chief Executive.

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Environment & Community Support Scrutiny – Agenda and Minutes	Town Hall, Peckham Road, London. SE5 8UB	Peter Roberts Scrutiny Team 020 7525 7229

Audit Trail

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CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Borough Solicitor & Secretary	No	No
Chief Finance Officer	No	No

