

Item No. 6.	Classification: Open	Date: 14 March 2011	Meeting Name: Democracy Commission
Report title:		Stage 2 of the Democracy Commission Terms of Reference and Workplan	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Democracy Commission considers and agrees the Terms of Reference for Phase 2 at Appendix 1.

That the Democracy Commission considers and agrees the workplan for the second phase of its work at paragraphs 16-21.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The Council Assembly at its meeting on 19 May 2010 agreed that the cabinet be tasked with establishing a democracy commission with the following aims:
 - To consider the avenues of democratic engagement with the council for local residents.
 - Specifically to fully review how council assembly can be changed to increase democratic engagement with local people.
3. On 15 June 2010 the cabinet agreed to establish a Democracy Commission with the following key recommendations:
 - Consider changes to the council's constitution to make the council's democratic functions more open and engaging.
 - Be focused and task-based to increase its ability to deliver recommendations for substantive change and so that it can be delivered within existing budgets.
 - That the first task should be to consider reforms to Council Assembly.
4. After considering the evidence, the commission made a number of recommendations aimed at making the content and format of council assembly meetings more engaging and responsive to the needs and concerns of residents. These are now being implemented, mainly through the introduction of themed debates at Council Assembly meetings from April 2011.
5. On 25 January 2011, cabinet resolved that the Democracy Commission be tasked with phase 2 of their work, focusing on the role and powers of community councils in the context of budgetary savings. The Democracy Commission will report their progress to council assembly in April 2011 and make their final recommendations in December 2011. The terms of reference for the Democracy Commission in relation to phase two can be found at Appendix 1.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Council Budget 2011/14

6. The review of community councils is to be undertaken within the context of the recently agreed council budget and the reductions in public expenditure. The task of the Commission will be to deliver a reduction of £344,000 in the total costs of community councils to take effect from 1 April 2012.
7. That all other aspects of the review into the role, function and effectiveness of community councils are framed within the aforementioned constraints.
8. Relevant information concerning the running costs of community councils in relation to their various functions will be gathered and presented to the Commission. It is suggested that this should be the initial task within the workplan of the Democracy Commission, which can be found below.

Role and function of Community Councils

9. The extent to which community councils have strengthened links into local communities will need to be established. It will be necessary to examine the role and function of community councils, and identify the ways in which they have fulfilled their remit or otherwise.
10. In summary, community councils are designed to build relationships with the local community through involvement in decision-making, greater transparency and accountability. They have a remit to act within the formal decision making procedures of the Council, yet create an informal enabling environment for local residents to participate actively. A copy of the relevant sections of the Southwark Constitution can be found at Appendix 2.
11. The role of Community Councils is to:
 - a) Promote involvement of local people in democratic process and bring decision making closer to the people
 - b) Take decisions on local matters through delegated decision-making powers over:
 - Local planning
 - Cleaner, Greener Safer Capital scheme
 - Community Council Revenue Fund
 - Traffic management
 - School governor appointments
 - Community project bank schemes
 - Highways and lighting improvement budget
 - Formal consultations
 - c) Conduct formal consultations on council wide policies and strategies
 - d) Take action on issues of concern to community members (e.g. through the petition scheme)
12. Officers will lead the relevant research, information-gathering and consultation work necessary to inform this area of the Commission's work, presenting

evidence back to members during its meetings.

13. The Localism and Decentralisation Bill which is currently being considered by parliament will also have implications for the role and function of Community Councils, for example, in the areas of planning and community empowerment. The Commission will need to take these ongoing developments into account as it carries out its work and may consider bringing in external experts to provide advice.
14. The recommendations made by the Democracy Commission during the first phase of its work will also have implications for Community Councils going forward, as they strengthen their link into Council Assembly. The introduction of themed debates at Council Assembly is to be linked to community engagement activity at Community Councils and other community forums prior to each meeting. Thus consolidating the community participation role of Community Councils and linking local residents into decision-making bodies of the council more effectively.

Workplan: Democracy Commission phase 2

15. The timeframe for the second phase of the Democracy Commission runs between April and December 2011; by which time the Commission will have undertaken its work and reported back to Council Assembly with its recommendations. This forms a similar structure to the first phase of the Commission's work.
16. It is suggested that the members of the Commission meet on a monthly basis in order to deliver this workplan (see timeframe in paragraph 19).
17. The following activities are to form part of the workplan:
 - Scrutiny of Community Council budgets across the Constitutional and Neighbourhoods teams
 - Qualitative research involving key stakeholders, including:

Stakeholder	Consultation method
Community Council Chairs and Vice-Chairs	Workshop/forum
Other Cllrs and cabinet members	Questionnaires
Regular attendees	Focus group & questionnaires
Other residents	Vox pops, focus group & questionnaires
Officers	Questionnaires

- Monitoring data on attendance and participation at community council meetings
 - Possible stakeholder event
 - Audit of best practice in area committee structures within other local authorities
 - Preparation of final report and recommendations
18. Much of the above work will be officer led, with regular updates on progress and information gathered being presented to the Commission during its schedule of meetings.

19. The Commission should also consider whether it would like to advise officers to engage any particular external experts/community leaders/active citizens/partners during the second phase of its work.
20. The following timeframe is suggested for phase two activities :

DEMOCRACY COMMISSION WORKPLAN APRIL – DECEMBER 2011	
March	<p>PREPARATORY WORK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft workplan • Convene Democracy Commission meeting to agree terms of reference and workplan • Inform relevant teams and members
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit workplan to Council Assembly (April 6) • Start research • Democracy Commission meeting: <i>Budgets</i>
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop with Chairs & Vice-Chairs • Democracy Commission meeting: <i>Role and purpose of Community Councils, Neighbourhoods and Boundaries</i>
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups • Distribute questionnaires • June round of community council meetings • Democracy Commission meeting: <i>Planning</i>
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups • Distribute questionnaires • Democracy Commission meeting: <i>Engagement and Promotion</i>
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Community conversations” outreach – gathering vox pops from local people • Mid-project review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information from other local authorities ○ Initial findings from focus groups and questionnaires ○ Attendance and monitoring information
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further research/analysis • Stakeholder event (tbc) (share results and consult on potential recommendations) • Democracy Commission meeting: <i>Mid-project review</i>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft recommendations • Further research/analysis • Democracy Commission meeting: <i>Setting Phase two recommendations</i>

Early November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democracy Commission meeting: <i>Agreeing Phase two recommendations</i>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet to consider Democracy Commission recommendations
January 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make recommendations to Council Assembly

Policy implications

21. The terms of reference for the Democracy Commission phase two have been drawn up within the specific context of current council policies, plans and strategies. The information gathered during the second phase of the commission's work will provide opportunities for the council to engage in debate with residents and will potentially provide decision makers with new information when developing council policy.

Community impact statement

22. The aim of the Democracy Commission is to bring the Council closer to its residents, making it more accountable to them and more connected with their concerns. The work of the Commission will be led by the Community Engagement team that has significant experience in leading work of this nature, aimed at improving the voices of local people in decision-making. The engagement activity will be underpinned by principles of equality and human rights (including the new public sector equality duty which comes into force in April 2011) and will reflect the diverse residents of the borough.

23. The work of the first phase of Democracy Commission has received significant feedback from the community which was empowered with the aim of increasing public engagement with the council and enhancing the community leadership role of the council. An Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment of the Democracy Commission recommendations was completed and presented to cabinet in earlier this year.

Resource implications

24. No additional budget is required for the setting up of the commission and stage two of its work. Any costs will be covered within existing resources. The commission will be required to bear in mind the need to keep under review the officer and other resources required to support its work and the implementation of its recommendations within the context of increasing resource constraints on the council.

25. The task of the Commission will be to deliver a reduction of £344,000 in the total costs of community councils to take effect from 1 April 2012 as agreed in the council's Policy and resources Strategy 2011-2014.

Consultation

26. The work of the commission so far has included public consultation and involvement: public meetings and conferences, questionnaires, focus group and recording vox pops. This work will be developed and improved upon during phase two.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Democracy Commission Phase 1 reports and agenda	Tooley Street, London SE1 2TZ	Julie Timbrell 020 7525 0514
Council assembly reports, agenda and minutes	Tooley Street, London SE1 2TZ	Lesley John 020 7525 7228
Cabinet report, agenda and minutes	Tooley Street, London SE1 2TZ	Paula Thornton 020 7525 4395

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Terms of Reference of the Democracy Commission
Appendix 2	Extract from Southwark constitution - Community Councils

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Deborah Collins, Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	
Report Author	Stephen Douglass, Head of Community Engagement	
Version	Final	
Dated	04 March 2011	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	Yes	Yes
Finance Director	No	No
List other officers here		
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	04 March 2011	