

<b>Item No.</b> 7	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 3 August 2011	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Democracy Commission
<b>Report title:</b>		Community Council Engagement	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Democracy Commission considers the examples of good practice contained in this report on Community Council engagement.
2. That the Democracy Commission takes these practices into account when finalising recommendations on the future role and purpose of Community Councils.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. 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 make their final recommendations in December 2011.
4. At the first meeting of the second phase of the Democracy Commission Members agreed a workplan. As part of that workplan Members agreed to receive a report setting out examples of engagement at Community Councils (CC) so that they could gain an appreciation of the different ways that CC have tried to improve the way meetings are conducted.
5. The purpose of this report is to set out examples in Appendix 1 of how this has happened and Members are asked to consider these in the light of the need to review the role and purpose of Community Councils. It also gives an insight into some of the ways current budgets have been utilised to make CCs *'more than just a meeting'*.

## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

### Community Council budget savings

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 make recommendations to cabinet and council which can deliver a reduction of £344,000 in the total costs of community councils to take effect from 1 April 2012.

7. At the last meeting of the Democracy Commission, members in a closed session looked at the role of the various staff deployed to assist the running and operation of meetings. This paper concentrates on what the authority gets from the engagement role i.e. to increase the range of different activities within meetings and encouraging greater participation and involvement from those attending meetings.
8. In each of the quadrants that make up Southwark, one case study is given in the appendix. These are Dulwich CC event at Dulwich Festival; Walworth CC Housing themed meetings; Peckham CC Health themed meetings and Bermondsey CC Employment and Training Fair.
9. From each example, Members are asked to consider:
  - The role and purpose of the initiative
  - The impact the initiative has had on the particular CC area
  - The opportunity for this to be shared across all CC areas
  - The key outcomes that have been achieved.
  - Whether reducing budgets will have an impact on these initiatives and make people less likely to attend and participate in CC meetings.
  - Alternative ways these initiatives could have been undertaken

### **Community Council Improvements**

10. The existing Community Council areas were founded in 2003. Since then there have been two reviews of Community Councils in 2005 and 2008. Each has made recommendations to improve the way Community Councils operate.
11. The Community Council improvement strategy has been based on two defining principles agreed by Chairs and Vice Chairs in 2009: Firstly, to make meetings more engaging and involving a range of different activities to do this. Secondly, to utilise existing budgets more effectively to make the most of the money available to CCs.

### **More than just a meeting**

12. As the case studies appended to this report show, a range of different ways have been used:
  - The most important way has been **themed meetings**, rather than CC meetings being an often diverse tick box exercise, i.e. the Council talking to the public on various plans, Chairs have been encouraged to establish themes to each specific meeting so that those with an interest in the particular topic e.g. transport or those in a particular group/community e.g. older people will be encouraged to attend.
  - Secondly, **different venues** have been used such as schools, shopping centres and community halls so that people from various neighbourhoods within a CC area can attend.

- More often, rather than just a stream of top-down presentations, **facilitated workshops** have been used, particularly where the theme has several topics such as area action plans.
  - Lastly **varying times** have been used by some CCs to attract those who find evening meetings, often after work, unsuitable and Saturday mornings and weekday afternoons have been tried.
13. Community councils have also been successful on engaging on specific regeneration issues such as the development of Elephant and Castle. Lend Lease the developers have attended Borough & Bankside Community Councils regularly in 2010/11. Regular attendance at the community council meetings has allowed Lend Lease to keep residents informed on what is happening with the development and has allowed them to develop their consultation plan and reach more people and organisations.
  14. Community Councils have also been used in the preparation of area action plans most notably Rotherhithe with the Canada Water Area Action Plan and Peckham/Nunhead and Peckham Rye with the Peckham Area Action Plan. Residents were informed about the consultation process at the community council meetings and several workshops were held. The workshops which took place at the meetings referred to proposals for the preferred sites and options for development. Representatives from the developers use the community council meetings to update residents and councillors about pending planning applications for the sites. This practice is hoped to be repeated in Borough and Bankside following the agreement with Lend Lease over the re-development of the Elephant and Castle area.

### **Making the most of your money**

15. As was discussed in previous Commission meetings, Community Councils have a publicity and marketing budget at their disposal to encourage engagement activities. They also have devolved budgets such as the Community Fund (CF) and Cleaner, Greener safer fund (CGS).
16. Some Community Councils such as Dulwich have had **ward-based meetings**. This has reduced the need for many leaflets and in this area one general poster has been used. This had freed up funds to hold forums (not actual CC meetings) with the public at existing events such as Dulwich Festival.
17. Some Community Councils have **interactive voting** at meetings which allows for those attending to participate directly and transparently in a decision-making process.. In the case of Walworth, this fed back into a Scrutiny review of the Housing repairs service.
18. Others have **activities and fairs** at meetings. Peckham has had a health theme all year and organised free health checks and healthy eating sessions.
19. More than one CC area has organised employment and training fairs where a range of providers have turned meetings into a showcase where

people can find out about local job opportunities.

20. Not everyone in a CC area would be able to attend meetings and many CCs have engaged people before meetings either through **vox-pops** or commissioning community groups to produce **films**.
21. In terms of delegated funds some Community Councils have used formats to involve those attending meetings. Versions of the *Monopoly* game and *Dragons Den* tv programme have been used to recommend allocations of CGS and CF to Members.

### **Attendance levels**

22. Appendix 2 to this report includes up to date records of attendance at meetings, and Appendix 3 shows trends from previous years. This information has been updated to include figures from recent meetings and the actual headcount of residents taken at the meetings, rather than just those that have registered.
23. Members have requested additional detail on residents that attend meetings across community council boundaries. This data will be presented at the September meeting of the Commission.

### **Policy Implications**

24. The aim of this report is to allow the Democracy Commission to consider how the Community Councils can operate better and making them more accountable to peoples concerns. .

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

<b>Background Papers</b>	<b>Held At</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Democracy Commission Phase 2 reports and agenda	Tooley Street, London, SE1 2TZ	Tim Murtagh 020 7525 7187

### **APPENDICES**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Title</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b>	Community Council Engagement Case Studies
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Updated Community Council Attendance Data
<b>Appendix 3</b>	Updated Community Council Historical Attendance Data

## AUDIT TRAIL

<b>Lead Officer</b>	Deborah Collins, Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	
<b>Report Author</b>	Stephen Douglass, Head of Community Engagement	
<b>Version</b>	Final	
<b>Dated</b>	26 July 2011	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	Yes	No
Finance Director	No	No
List other officers here		
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Yes	No
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	25 July 2011	