

<b>Item No.</b> 8.	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 22 September 2011	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Democracy Commission – Phase 2
<b>Report title:</b>		Area committees in other local authorities	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance	

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Democracy Commission note the contents of this report which examines how area committees and/or forums and devolved decision-making is are handled by other local authorities.
2. That the Democracy Commission use this information to inform its recommendations for savings and improvements to community councils.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. As outlined in the Commission's workplan, officers have undertaken a data gathering exercise aimed at identifying useful and interesting area committee/forum models from other local authorities, particularly in the context of delegated decision-making.
4. At the June meeting of the Commission, members suggested that officers should focus on local authorities that shared some of the following characteristics with Southwark:
  - socio-demography and location
  - significant level of delegated decision-making to area forums
  - emphasis on community engagement
5. Members were particularly keen to find out about innovative approaches other authorities have taken to effectively engaging local people, without high levels of delegated decision making. This would be particularly valuable information in the context of the need to identify the required savings to community council budgets.

## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

### Local authorities in inner London

6. The following inner London boroughs have been selected to inform this report on area committee models. None have formal decision-making powers:

Local authority	Type of area committee/forum structure	Level of devolved decision-making	Comparison with Southwark
Lambeth	Some area forums e.g. Brixton but no formal council involvement. Led by residents and voluntary sector.	None.  <b>See Appendix 1 for more detail.</b>	Similar socio-demographics  No formal council support role
Tower Hamlets	Local Area Partnerships (now defunct)	LAPs may still exist to deliver service / council activities, but there are no more meetings, or any other localised decision making.	Inner London borough  No area committee structure
Westminster	Six Area Forums held across the borough, three times per year. They focus on providing local people with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• information on Council services</li> <li>• a mechanism to have their say on any issue in their local area or related to Council business</li> <li>• an opportunity to put forward suggestions to councillors for allocating their Neighbourhood Funds</li> <li>• details of actions raised and monitored</li> </ul>	None.  The Neighbourhood Fund provides £46,000 per ward.  Local councillors have been given an annual budget since April 2008 to spend on local projects in their wards. The budgets are intended to enable councillors to address local issues and priorities that matter most to residents.	Inner London borough  Devolved budgets but not formal decision-making
Islington	Currently none.  Area committees were introduced in May 2002 as part of the local government modernisation programme and ran until April 2011.  There used to be five area committees involving local councillors and residents in a format similar to regular community council meetings.  Each area committee was allocated £80,000 which they	None	Inner London borough  Emphasis on engagement and allocation of relatively small sums.

	could give to local projects.  Local funding is now allocated by the Voluntary and Community Sector Committee.		
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### Local authorities with some devolved decision-making at a local level

7. The following sample of local authorities that have devolved decision-making through an area forum/committee has been gathered to inform this review:

Local authority	Type of area committee/forum structure	Level of devolved decision-making	Comparison with Southwark
Kingston	Four Neighbourhood Committees consisting of three, four and five wards).  The meetings are formal council meetings and strategic in nature. There is no special focus on engagement	Committees make decisions about local issues such as traffic, parking, highways, planning applications and have local budgets for these services  <b>See Appendix 1 for more detail.</b>	Outer London Borough  Much wider scope of devolved decision making, but less community engagement
Barnet	Area Environment Sub-Committees and Residents Forums (3), based on constituency boundaries.	The subcommittees have limited devolved decision making (executive) powers.  Forums are chaired by a councillor but are consultative only. They take place before the environment sub-committee meeting. Residents can raise environmental issues (previously any issues) by submitting questions until 6pm the day before the meeting to which a written response will be given (or an officer will come along to the meeting in person)	Outer London Borough  Only limited engagement function

## Local authorities with no devolved decision-making at a local level

8. The following sample of local authorities that have no devolved decision-making at a local level, or have no area forum/committee structures at all:

Local authority	Type of area committee/forum structure	Level of devolved decision-making	Comparison with Southwark
Waltham Forest	<p>Community Ward Forums (one per ward attended by 3 ward members, officers, members of the public)</p> <p>Community Councils replaced by Community Ward Forums in Jan 2011 in response to the views of residents. Greater emphasis on engagement</p> <p>Resulted in savings of £150,000 and one staff post</p>	<p>No devolved decision making. Community ward forum meetings are open to individual residents, community groups and business representatives who want to help shape and improve their neighbourhood.</p> <p><b>See Appendix 1 for more detail.</b></p>	<p>Used to have community councils with some decision-making powers.</p> <p>Now has opted for engagement only model.</p>
Lewisham	<p>Local assemblies in each of the 18 wards.</p> <p>Meet four times a year to discuss local priorities and create an action plan. Involve police and voluntary sector.</p>	<p>No devolved decision making or obvious role in consultations.</p> <p>They have an Assembly Fund of 20k approx per ward.</p>	<p>London borough</p> <p>Strong emphasis on community engagement and the role of councillors as community champions.</p>
Hounslow	<p>Area committees (5)</p> <p>Give local citizens a greater say in council affairs and are responsible for monitoring local service provision including planning and highway related matters; and for other local decisions that may be delegated by the executive.</p> <p>They involve councillors for each particular area and meetings are held in public.</p>	<p>None.</p> <p>The planning meetings used to decide planning applications, but these meetings were abolished in May 2011.</p>	<p>Used to have both engagement and planning meetings, similar to Southwark.</p>

	<p>Until May 2001, each area had separate meetings to look at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring (to review and monitor services)</li> <li>• Planning (to consider and allocate local planning and traffic management budgets)</li> </ul>		
Windsor	<p>Town Forums (2) - Maidenhead Town Forum and the Windsor Town Forum</p> <p>Consultative forums acting in an advisory capacity to the Cabinet</p> <p>Membership agreed at full council</p>	<p>None currently, but there is potential to devolve some decision-making powers to them at a future date.</p> <p>The Forums work with local residents, businesses, organisations (both public and private sector).</p>	
Harrow	None	<p>Harrow are currently undertaking a review of their operations and may consider area forums/committees, as part of a transformational agenda.</p>	Outer London Borough
Bromley	None	<p>Initially had some sub-committees (north, central and south), but these were abandoned due to low attendance, and an opinion by members that they duplicate the function of members' surgeries and other organisations.</p>	Outer London Borough

## Local authorities in other parts of the UK

9. The following are examples of how city councils and authorities in other parts of the UK use the area committee model to engage with local people:

Local authority	Type of area committee/forum structure	Level of devolved decision-making	Comparison with Southwark
Manchester	<p>No area committees. Instead there are Ward Co-ordinators and Ward Support Officers who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make sure that a Ward Plan and Ward Newsletters are produced</li> <li>• make sure that local people are consulted about what is important to them</li> <li>• respond to local people's concerns about Council and other public services</li> <li>• work closely with local ward councillors</li> <li>• hold Ward Co-ordination Group meetings</li> </ul> <p>There are also 6 Overview &amp; Scrutiny committees, including a Communities &amp; Neighbourhoods Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee (which looks at the city as a whole not per neighbourhood).</p>	None	<p>City council in north west.</p> <p>No area committees, but equivalent of neighbourhoods team.</p>
Newcastle	<p>Ward committees – focus on engagement.</p> <p>Ward Coordinators are taking the lead role in revamping the way in which Ward Committees engage with local people e.g. by using themed meetings.</p>	None	Use of themed meetings. But no decision-making powers.
Salford	Eight neighbourhoods,	None, though some	Similar

	<p>each with a Neighbourhood Team which consists of: representatives from the council, Police, Fire Service, Primary Care Trust, housing agencies, and other organisations.</p> <p>Structure is being reviewed at the moment.</p> <p>Each area has a Community Committee which provides a forum for local residents to set community priorities and decide on how devolved budgets are allocated.</p> <p>Also often have sub groups to focus on specific issues e.g. parks</p>	<p>influence on devolved budgets (100k per neighbourhood).</p>	<p>structure of neighbourhoods teams and meetings.</p> <p>However, ongoing review may lead to structure being abolished.</p>
Wolverhampton	<p>14 Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNPs) provide the means for local communities to work with service providers and commissioners in shaping the design, planning and delivery of public services.</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>Councillors not involved in LNPs</p>
Liverpool	<p>None, engagement done through a team of Neighbourhood Managers. This is under review.</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>No area committee structure or decision-making at local level.</p>

10. The tables below indicate that there are a range of approaches to devolved decision-making across London, and the UK. Of the inner London boroughs highlighted above, not one has a comparable area committee structure to Southwark in terms of the devolution of formal decision-making. Rather, there is more a tendency towards devolved local budgets.
11. In terms of the broader picture, there seems to be a movement away from formal decision-making (Kingston being the notable exception), and towards improving engagement, local debate and community leadership and ownership e.g. through local budgets. There are likely to be a number of contributory factors to this, ranging from the unfavourable financial climate, to the lack of local interest. In some cases, area committee structures are completely absent, and other

methods – such as officer-led engagement or voluntary sector partnerships – are used to involve local people in decisions that affect their community.

### **Policy implications**

12. 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**

13. 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.

### **Resource implications**

14. 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.
15. 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**

16. The work of the commission includes 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**

<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

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Area Committee Case Studies.

## 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>	15 September 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	
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Yes	No	
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Team</b>	15 September 2011		