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**REPORT OF THE DEMOCRACY COMMISSION – PHASE 2
COMMUNITY COUNCILS**

LIST OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Role and purpose of community councils
3. Budget and resource issues
4. Boundaries and neighbourhoods
5. Planning functions
6. Environment and transport
7. Engagement
8. Consultation
9. Other issues
10. Recommendations

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference and Membership

Appendix 2 – Community council budgets

Appendix 3 - Constitution extract for CCs

Appendix 4 – Feedback from consultation

Appendix 5 – Planning options

1 INTRODUCTION

Role of the Democracy Commission

- 1.1 On 25 January 2011, cabinet resolved that the Democracy Commission be tasked with phase two of their work, focusing on the role and powers of community councils in the context of budgetary savings. The full terms of reference and membership of the Commission can be found at Appendix 1.
- 1.2 The Commission has been tasked with making 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. All other aspects of the review into the role, function and effectiveness of community councils are framed within the aforementioned constraints.
- 1.3 The cabinet asked the Democracy Commission to make their final recommendations for presentation to the cabinet in early December 2011.

How the commission has undertaken its review

- 1.4 The Democracy Commission has met roughly on a monthly basis from March 2011 to consider the core functions and effectiveness of community councils, and identify the savings highlighted above.
- 1.5 Information has been submitted to the commission in the form of reports and officer presentations, including input from departments that administer the various decision-making functions of community councils. Resident consultation has been a particular focus for the commission, both at community council meetings and through workshops and focus groups. The commission also received comparative data from other local authorities on the provision made for community engagement and local decision making.
- 1.6 The full work plan of the Commission can be found at Appendix 2.

Structure of this report

- 1.7 This report revisits the key evidence presented to the commission over the past few months under the various thematic headings contained in the work plan. In order to facilitate the process of setting the recommendations, each section contains headings summarising:
 - Areas of consensus from each meeting
 - Relevant input from the resident consultations in relation to each theme
 - Some draft recommendations for the commission to consider

2 ROLE AND PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS

2.1 In the May 2011 meeting of the Commission, an overview paper was presented which laid out the role and function of community councils, as provided by the constitution.

2.2 These can be split into three distinct areas, and members were asked to consider the balance of these functions as they set about identifying areas for savings and improvements:

- Constitutional/formal decision making role
- Engagement role
- Consultative role

2.3 The constitutional/formal decision-making role of community councils is set out in Part 3H of the council's constitution and is split into a) decision making and b) consultative/non-decision making functions. Community councils have executive (delegated by the Leader of the Council) and non-executive decision-making functions (delegated by Council Assembly).

2.4 The formal decision making and consultative functions of community councils are summarised in the following table:

Table 1: Formal and Consultative Decision Making at Community Councils

Role	Decision making	Consultative	Function
Planning	Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning applications - Fewer than 50 housing units, under 3,500m² floor space, change of use and contrary to local development framework or controversial • Tree preservation orders 	Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning policy issues • To comment on Section 106 - Funds over £100,000 • Information reports on local planning enforcement issues 	Non-executive function
Environmental management	Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend local contract variations to chief officer • Appoint ward 	Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider regular reports on environmental management issues 	Executive function

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Role	Decision making	Consultative	Function
	members to warden schemes steering groups.		
Cleaner, Greener, Safer	<p>Yes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the allocation of funds to Cleaner, Greener, Safer capital schemes • Oversee and take responsibility for development and implementing of local schemes 	<p>Yes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend bids to cabinet for funding for capital schemes as part of an open bidding process 	Executive function
Community Council Fund	<p>Yes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Award of grants 		<p>Executive function</p> <p>Note: this role is delegated by the cabinet and is not currently listed in the constitution.</p>
Traffic Management	<p>Yes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Award of non strategic traffic management matters 	<p>Yes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following a strategic decision to introduce a parking or traffic safety scheme to be consulted on the detail of the scheme • Borough spending plans • Consulted on parking zones or home zones 	Executive function
Community Project Bank	<p>Yes</p> <p>Approve projects for inclusion in the bank</p>	None	Executive function

Role	Decision making	Consultative	Function
Education - School Governor Appointments	Yes Local authority governors for nursery and primary schools within area	None	Executive function

2.5 In terms of engagement, community councils have been successful in balancing the constitutional and legal requirements of taking formal decisions and engaging effectively with local people. Being area based community councils give an opportunity for members to enhance their ward role by engaging with residents in their locality. Community councils are encouraged to be ‘more than a meeting’, and this function of community councils, which is particularly valued by residents, will be explored later in the engagement section of this report.

2.6 A full extract from the constitution outlining the role and function of community councils can be found at Appendix 3.

Areas of consensus

2.7 Members have previously indicated a willingness to remove the appointment of school governors from community councils, which is an executive decision-making function. These appointments tend to be made during a closed session at the end of community council meetings, thus presenting a barrier to engagement with residents. However it should be noted that at the Commission’s meeting in November, it was reported that Dulwich councillors particularly valued this aspect of decision making as it provided an important link to local nursery and primary schools. A specific recommendation is set out in the next chapter on budgets.

Consultation

2.8 Whilst members value the formal decision-making role of community councils, the focus groups and consultation with residents has shown that views differ as to how important the link to formal decision-making is. For example, during the focus groups it was clear that most people were not aware of which issues that came to community councils were just for consultation, and which involved formal decisions being taken by local representatives.

2.9 However, what is critical is for local people to be consulted, within a reasonable timeframe about decisions which will be taken that affect their local area. The ultimate decision-making authority appears less important to residents than having a clear, transparent, meaningful (i.e. a chance to influence the decision/s) and well-managed process to enable them to share their views and receive feedback on the final decision within a set timescale.

2.10 At the September meeting of the Commission as part of the preliminary discussions on the shaping its recommendations, officers reported that members may wish to consider where the appropriate balance lies between the decision-making and engagement roles of community councils; as this may

be helpful in identifying savings and shaping recommendations about the future role of community councils.

- 2.11 The Commission considered a paper on area committees across other boroughs which was presented at the September meeting. This confirmed a strong trend away from devolved decision-making at a local level and movement towards local or ward-based engagement and consultation on local issues and devolved budgets. One particular finding was that a very few boroughs undertake planning decision making at a local level. In Southwark planning is the most significant area of devolved decision-making to community councils and commands a significant budget. A significant saving could be made if planning were removed from community councils, particularly if decisions were taken at senior officer level, accompanied by a set consultation framework involving relevant community council areas. More detail on the various savings options in this area is provided in the planning section of this report

ROLE AND PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY COUNCILS

Shaping the recommendations - points to consider

1. That members will need to consider the where the appropriate balance lies between decision-making and engagement roles of community councils, as this will help shape the identification of savings, and the ways in which community councils can be developed in the future.
2. That it be noted that the paper on area committees across other boroughs which was presented at the September meeting confirmed a strong trend away from devolved decision-making at a local level and movement towards local or ward-based engagement and consultation on local issues and devolved budgets.

3 BUDGET AND RESOURCE ISSUES

- 3.1. At the April meeting, Commission members were presented with an overview of the budget allocated to the running of community councils in the 2011-12 financial year. The purpose of the report was to provide the commission with relevant information concerning the running costs of community councils in relation to their various functions to inform the process of savings identification.
- 3.2. The following table contains a top-level breakdown of the budget allocated to the running of Community Councils in the current financial year (2011-12). This includes staff costs for the Constitutional team and Neighbourhoods team who manage and administer the eight Community Councils, publicity and running costs for the actual meetings, as well as the Community Council Fund.

Table 2: Total Cost of Community Councils 2011/12

Total Budget for Community Councils 2011/12	
Neighbourhoods team	693,817
Constitutional team	528,100
SLA Charges	88,500
Total	1,310,417

- 3.3. A detailed breakdown of each of the budget lines was presented to the Commission in April in their information pack. These figures have been updated and are included at Appendix 4.
- 3.4. It is worth reiterating that issues relating to staff numbers are reserved to the chief executive and officers appointed by her. This does not prevent the Commission making recommendations that impact on staffing numbers but if this is the case then these need to be made to the Strategic Director of Communities, Law & Governance who will consider whether they are implementable.
- 3.5. The Democracy Commission on 22 September 2011 considered the final evidence submitted to it as part of its review of community councils, with the exception of some consultation feedback received in November. The commission also considered how it wished to consider shaping the recommendations. Having considered possible areas of consensus and those issues requiring further consideration, the commission asked that officers prepare a summary of options based on the evidence submitted to date for the meeting in November.
- 3.6. In November the commission was presented with a series of detailed options with estimated costs based on the evidence submitted to date. Each summary of options was divided into two sections:
- General Savings from the constitutional team and neighbourhood team budgets

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- Individual options – the general savings are included in most of the options.
- 3.7. The general savings reflect some of the areas of consensus identified by members during the evidence gathering meetings of the commission.

Options

- 3.8. The options in the spreadsheets were based on the following scenarios which were applied in different combinations:
- Retain eight community councils
 - Retain same level of meetings
 - Reduce the number of meetings to five or four per annum
 - Reduce the number of community council to five
 - Reduce the level of neighbourhood support to community council meetings e.g. workshops, outreach work with sub-groups, special events such as job fairs.

Areas for decision making

3.9. The following table sets out a matrix of the key areas for recommendation that the commission may wish to consider and a suggested order in which to take these. The decisions and options are based on the evidence submitted to date and the budget summary papers considered at the 14 November meeting.

Table 3: Summary of key issues for consideration

Decision	Savings	Issues to be considered
A	General Savings from the Constitutional Team and Neighbourhood Team	There are two figures based on whether or not the commission wishes to include school governor function in total with a saving of £10,895.
B	Boundaries and number of areas	1. To decide to have a structure based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eight areas• Seven areas• Six areas• Five areas 2. If the number of areas is reduced, commission to consider new boundaries based on ward boundaries.
C	Planning	Four options: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Model A – Status quo – retain at community councils• Model B – Delete the function• Model C – One planning sub-

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Decision	Savings	Issues to be considered
		committee • Model D – Two planning sub-committees. If Model C or D selected further issues on the subject of sub-committee membership.
D	Fewer main meetings	To decide on the frequency of main meetings: • Six main meetings per annum • Five main meetings per annum • Four main meetings per annum.
D	Other issues	These include: • Sponsorship • PA system.

Areas of consensus

3.10. The issue of community council budgets and staffing has been revisited at a number of meetings and some areas for making savings have emerged, e.g. around budgets for publicity and marketing across both the neighbourhoods and constitutional teams and savings on equipment hire. These are outlined in Table 4 below. With regard to the school governors function, it should be noted that at the meeting on 14 November 2011 it was reported that Dulwich councillors felt that this should be retained as a decision making function at community councils because it provided a link to local nursery and primary schools. If members chose not to include this item in the general savings then any shortfall would need to be found elsewhere.

Table 4: Proposed general savings

Constitutional Team		
Item No.	Description	Savings/annum
1	Marketing and Publicity (previously Take Note)	11,500
2	Sound System - under spend on budget	9,000
3	School governors function recharge to Children's Services	10,895
Sub-Total		31,395

Neighbourhoods Team		
Item No.	Description	Savings/annum

Neighbourhoods Team		
Item No.	Description	Savings/annum
4	Community council area budgets for individual publicity and marketing including transport to meetings/claims for carer costs and catering (in 2011/12 £10,083x8) - (50% saving identified)	40,332
5	Publicity and marketing of Community Council Fund (50% saving identified) £5,000	5,000
6	Interpreting and translation costs (50% saving identified) £4,800	4,800
Sub-Total		50,132
Total General Savings:		81,527

Consultation

- 3.11. Residents were asked to share their views on how savings could be made through focus group discussions, questionnaires and at community council meetings. This feedback is presented in the consultation section of this report.
- 3.12. Overall, residents understood the need to make savings, but views differ on how this should be done. Whilst most people were willing to accept savings around venue and equipment hire, there was little consensus about how substantive savings could be made. Although participants in the focus group clearly preferred having fewer meetings, this was not the case in terms of the questionnaires. It is therefore difficult to draw clear conclusions as to people's preferences for how significant savings can be made.

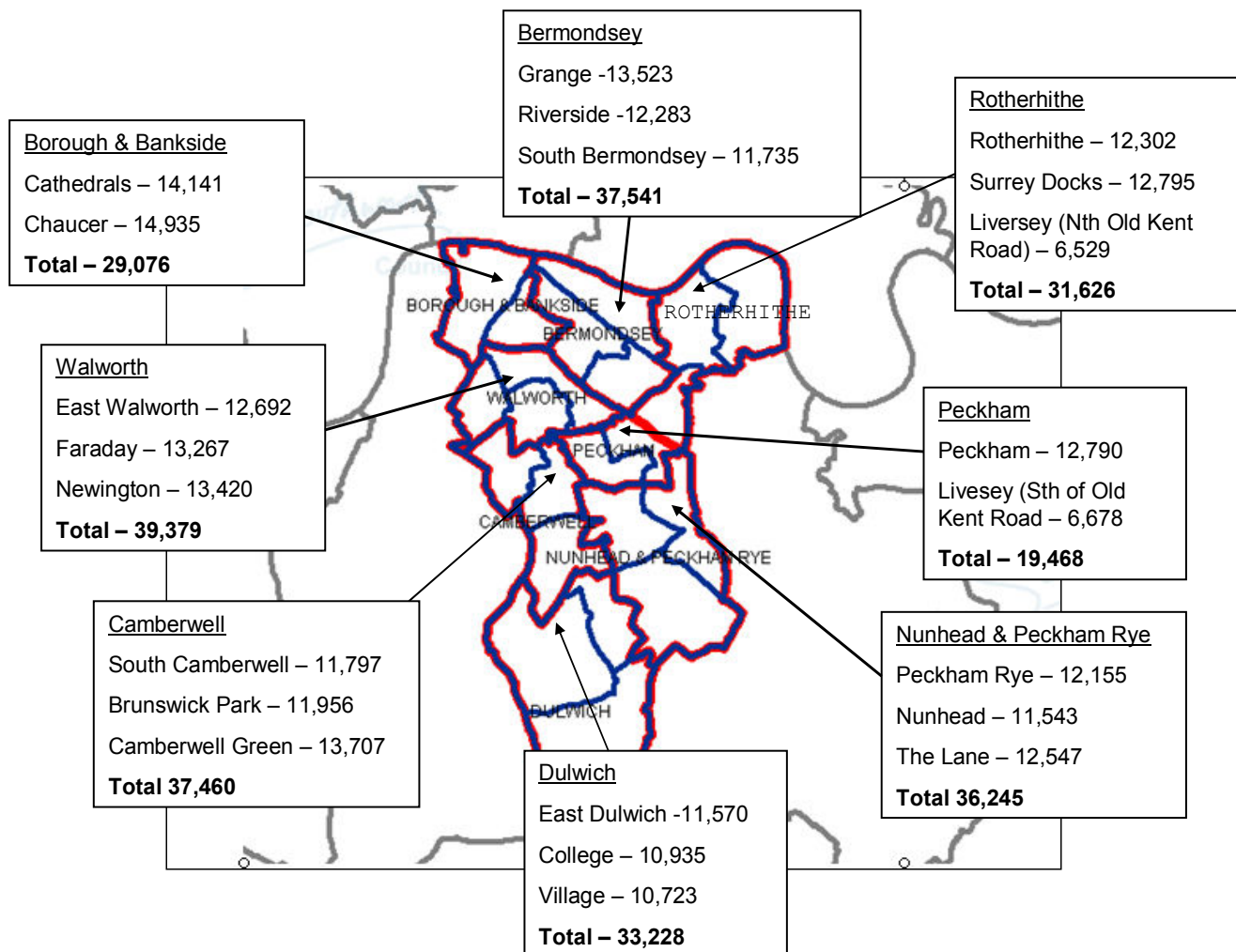
BUDGET AND RESOURCES ISSUES

Shaping the recommendations - points to consider

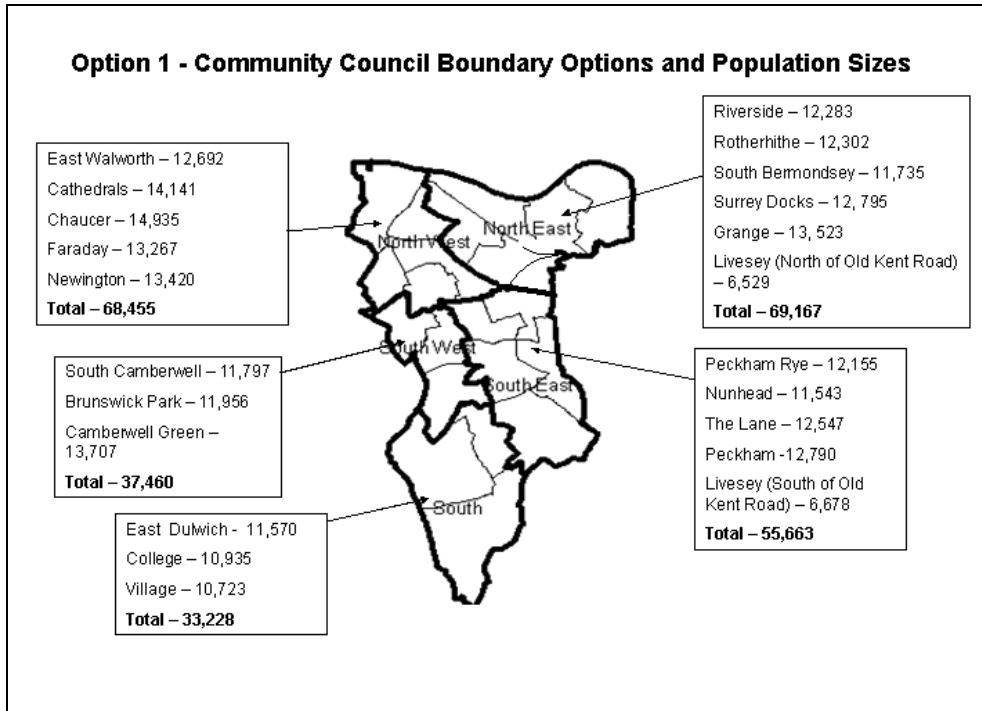
3. That the commission consider recommending that the appointment of local education authority school governors to the governing bodies of nursery and primary schools be removed from community council areas. These decisions should be taken at chief officer level to reduce administration and deliver a saving of £10,895.
4. Subject to recommendation 3 above, that the general savings set out in Table 4 be approved as a contribution to the savings target either:
- Including school governor appointments – Total £81,527
- or.
- Excluding school governor appointments – Total £70,632.

4 BOUNDARIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

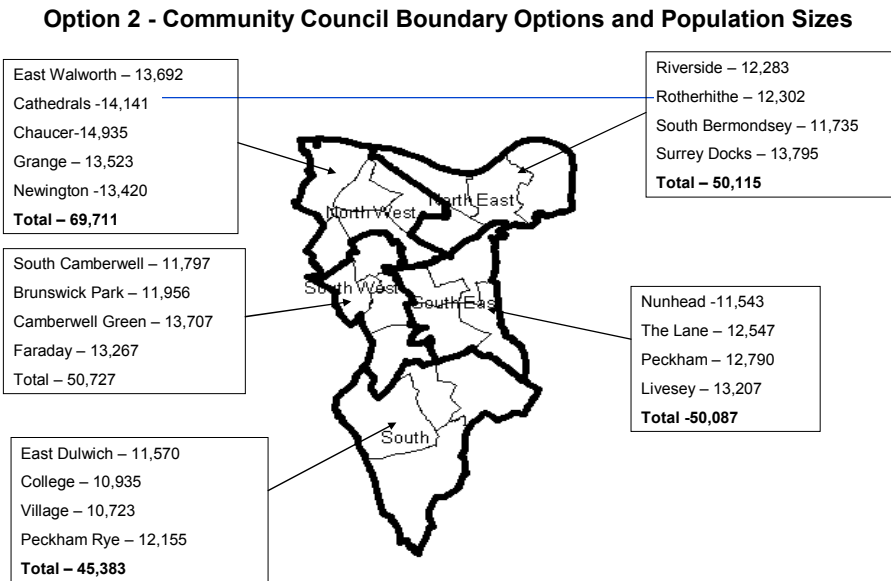
- 5.1. Changing community council boundaries to make areas larger was one of the options for making savings identified at the start of phase two. Four options for changing area boundaries - whilst maintaining rough parity of population size and the integrity of traditional neighbourhoods - were presented to the commission in May. All four options have been included again here.
- 5.2. The existing Community Council areas are shown below. There are 8 Community Council areas, with each area taking between 2-3 wards. The exception is Peckham Community Council which covers just 1.5 wards.



- 5.3. The following options give a detailed breakdown of what 5 Community Council areas could look like. In presenting these options, officers have been wary of balancing the responsibility to ensure population sizes do not greatly vary from area to area whilst retaining the integrity of traditional neighbourhood boundaries.

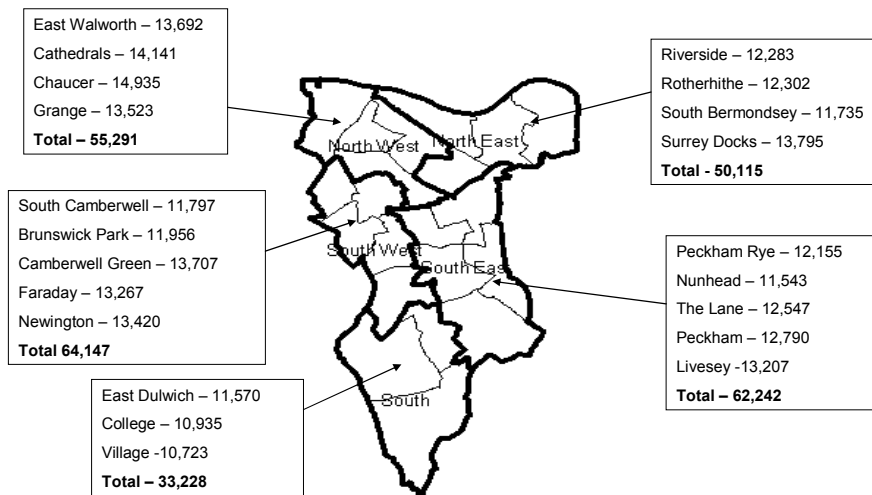


5.4. Although there is variation in times of population size, the integrity of traditional neighbourhoods remains with this option.



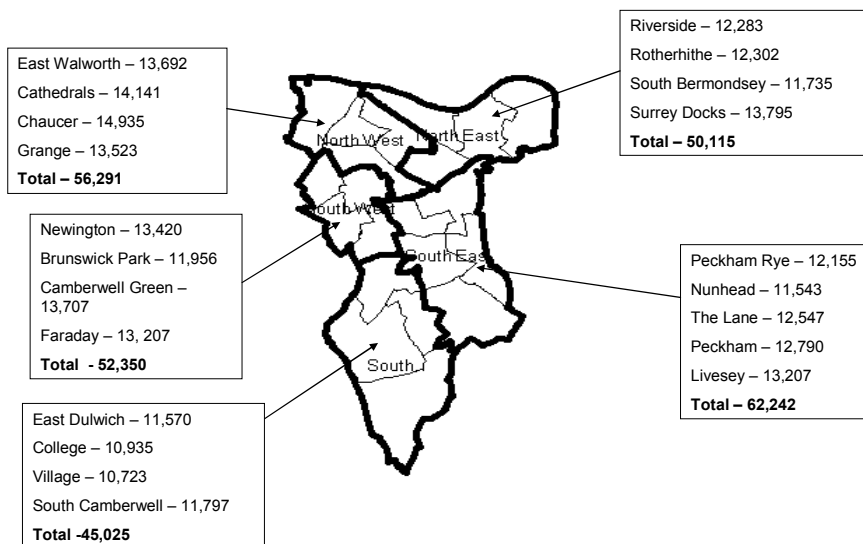
5.5. With this option sizes of population are more evenly distributed. However the wards that make up the neighbourhood of Peckham are split between two different Community Council areas.

Option 3 -Community Council Boundary Options and Population Sizes



5.6. This third option distributes population even more and subsequently takes away from the traditional neighbourhoods of Walworth and Camberwell by amalgamating them.

Option 4 - Community Council Boundary Options and Population Sizes



5.7. This last option moves further towards a more balanced distribution of population sizes whilst impacting on the traditional boundaries of three Community Council areas- Walworth, Camberwell and Dulwich.

Potential Budget savings

5.8. It was reported to the Commission that any recommendation reducing the

number of community council areas would lead to a subsequent reduction in the number of meetings and an opportunity to save costs. For example if the number of community council areas were to be reduced to five there would be 18 fewer main meetings and savings in terms of running costs (hire of PA equipment, printing of agendas, publicity leaflets) could be made. The following estimates are based on the figures were reported to the commission in November 2011.

- Main meetings saving: £49,439
 - A reduction in the number of community council planning meetings for the five areas would lead to approximately 33 fewer scheduled planning meetings.
 - Planning meetings saving: £51,000
 - Total meeting cost savings: £100,439 - This assumes the planning function is retained at community councils.
- 5.9. No additional budget is required for the setting up of the new community council boundaries. A re-branding of community council areas will need to be met from the existing publicity and marketing budget.
- 5.10. The commission in November also considered a number of budget saving options based on six community council areas. The commission has not received a separate report proposing possible boundaries for six areas.

Areas of consensus

- 5.11. The Commission has yet to identify a consensus approach in this area.
- 5.12. At the meeting of the commission held on 26 May 2011, members commented that some issues such as the regeneration of Elephant and Castle were currently dealt with by more than one community council.
- 5.13. The issue of split wards was also considered and Livesey was given as an example of how it was sometimes appropriate to split wards across different community council areas if this reflected the needs of residents and how those residents identified with their localities.
- 5.14. The commission held in September received a report on attendance at community councils. This showed areas of overlap of attendance between Bermondsey and Rotherhithe (20 people on average) and to a lesser extent between Peckham and Nunhead and Peckham Rye (3 people on average)

Consultation

- 5.15. As previously mentioned, there was a fairly uniform response across the focus groups with regular and non-regular attendees that having larger areas was the least favoured way of reducing community council budgets (see consultation section below). However, this was not the case in terms of the questionnaire responses, where people equally disliked the options of having larger areas and fewer meetings. It is worth noting, however that residents in some areas seem more willing than in others to consider merging with

neighbouring community councils, particularly if this reflected the needs and/or identity of residents.

NEIGHBOURHOODS AND BOUNDARIES

Shaping the recommendations – points to consider

5. The commission is invited to consider reducing the number of community council areas and the options are as follows:
 - Maintain the status quo of eight areas
 - Seven community council areas
 - Six community council areas
 - Five community council areas
6. Subject to recommendation 5, consider the options for community council areas (the four options for a five area structure are set out above).
7. That it be noted that any reduction in the number of areas would make a significant saving in the community council budget.
8. That it be noted reducing the number community council areas would have significant implications for the formal decision-making role. It would also affect their consultative and engagement functions and necessitate a different approach to agendas.

5 PLANNING FUNCTIONS

- 5.1. Currently community councils take planning decisions where the development proposed involves the creation of fewer than 50 housing units or less than 3500m². Community councils deal with a wide breadth of planning applications including majors, minors, and others. However, the large majority of applications heard by community councils fall into the minors and other categories of applications. The community councils also have consultative/non decision-making roles in areas such as s106 funding and conservation area adoption. Community Councils are scheduled to meet on a monthly basis (excluding the August break) to consider planning matters.
- 5.2. Prior to the establishment of community councils in 2003, all of the decisions currently considered by community councils were considered under delegated authority by a senior development management officer.
- 5.3. The Commission was presented with different options in relation to the planning function at community councils as follows:
- retain the planning function at community councils
 - delete the planning function at community councils
 - develop another planning decision making model.
- 5.4. The table below sets out the estimated financial impact of each of the options

Potential savings		Model A: Retain planning at community councils	Model B: Delete planning from community councils	Model C: Sub- committee model 1	Model D: Sub committee models 2 or 3
Security Services (Van hire etc)	£16,610	x	✓	✓	✓
Hire of rooms/halls	£5,885	x	✓	✓	✓
Legal Services for planning	£30,200	x	✓	Partially £25,670	Partially £19,932
Printing and postage	£14,740	x	✓	Partially £12,300	Partially £9,951
Staffing costs	£48,000	x	✓	✓	x
Departmental support costs - planning	£71,000	x	✓	Partially £60,350	Partially £46,860
Total Savings		£0	£186,435	£120,815	£92,238

- 5.5. It was reported to the Democracy Commission that the potential savings that could be achieved by withdrawing planning decision making from community councils could make a significant contribution to the commission's savings target.
- 5.6. For the maximum savings to be realised the majority of decisions currently taken by community council would need to be delegated to officers. This is the situation that existed prior to establishment of community councils in 2003.

Any significant transfer of decisions from community councils to the main planning committee would not be feasible because of the number of applications involved (approximately 192) and the establishment of planning sub-committees would impact on the savings which could be achieved.

- 5.7. The report presented to members outlined some of the advantages and difficulties in taking planning decisions at community council level:

Advantages:

- Taking the decision making process closer to local people.
- Accountability of decisions by local councillors.
- Providing for member discussions on applications to be in the local community.

Difficulties:

- Planning decisions at community council level can sometimes be difficult for members when faced with strong local opinion which may contradict planning policy.
- As planning decisions are taken by a variety of committees planning policy is not always applied consistently
- Members are often faced with the decision as to whether to sit on the committee and take a decision or withdraw from a decision in order to represent the views of constituents, this can limit the ability of members to get involved in local campaigns on planning applications
- Scheduling community council planning meetings causes extra pressure on the council calendar due to the need to schedule meetings on a 4 week cycle.
- A significant number of applications which are considered by community council planning meetings are 'out of date'; that is they are considered by community councils after the application expiry date and can be challenged for non-determination. Between June 2010 and May 2011 approximately 76% of applications were considered after the application expiry date.

- 5.8. The original report on planning and localism considered by the Commission officers had outlined that a direct transfer of decisions from community councils to the main planning committee may not be practical as the planning committee would be required consider approximately 192 additional applications a year. This would result in more frequent planning meetings which will have a cost implication. This cost implication was not included in the table above as the implications would depend on how many more meetings would be required and the officer support required.

- 5.9. The commission also considered the impact of the Localism Bill and noted that the bill does not strengthen the position of area committees but empowers non-elected bodies such as neighbourhood forums. The report also noted the role of community councils in developing planning policy and suggested a more formal role in terms of strategic planning policy. Some community councils have been successfully involved in the development of area actions plan such as the Canada Water Area Action Plan and Aylesbury Area Action Plan. This consultative role is not defined in the constitution but this role could be developed giving community councils an opportunity to discuss planning policy issues and comment on the framework for how applications are

determined in their local area.

- 5.10. As part of the discussion on area committees at other local authorities members noted that some authorities have removed the planning function from their area committees in May 2011 and that Southwark was one of the few local authorities which has currently delegated planning decisions to area committees.

Areas of consensus

- 5.11. Members expressed their support for retaining some planning function at member level which would mean there was still a degree of accountability. At the November meeting of the commission the meeting discussed the various planning models and in particular asked for further information on the implications for sub-committees for proportionality, membership and importance of all political groups being represented on a sub-committee(s) There was concern at the level of applications considered by community councils which were over the application expiry date and that these could be challenged for non-determination..
- 5.12. Members considered the level of objections required for an application to be considered by a community council and suggested that the thresholds for decision be reviewed.
- 5.13. Members suggested that options for sub-committees be explored; officers advised that it would be beneficial to review the thresholds and triggers for consideration of planning applications to ensure that the constitutional framework facilitated the savings which the commission sought to make. The table above sets out the potential sub-committee models reported to the commission, which could deliver varying degrees of savings, albeit not on the same level as delegating the planning functions to the relevant chief officer. Members of the Commission also discussed the possibility of introducing an area element to a sub-committee model for example east and west sub-committees or having a sub-committee of community council chairs. However introducing such arrangements would risk introducing a structure that would be more costly to administer and/or inefficient in that the meetings would not necessarily meet on the same frequency because of unequal workloads caused by a disproportionate number of applications at any time.
- 5.14. Council assembly would set the sub-committee membership and committees are required to be politically balanced, unless no member of the council votes against a disproportionate allocation of places.

Consultation

- 5.15. Community council chairs and vice chairs were also consulted on the planning function at community councils at their meeting in May 2011. Chairs and vice chairs commented on the importance of taking planning decisions at a local level, but raised concerns relating to the number of applications which were out of time when brought to the community councils and which could be appealed on the grounds of non-determination. It was suggested, at that meeting, that if planning is removed from community councils a commitment is made to return that decision making function to the community councils if the budget allows in the future.

5.16. Participants in the general resident focus groups indicated that:

- Planning should be centralised
- Planning meetings should not be incorporated; they are physically exhausting.
- Planning could be cut at community council level but have a slot or paper distributed at each meeting to inform people what will be going to central planning from the local area, and how to get involved.

5.17. A dedicated planning focus group was held in early September (see Appendix 5 for full detail on the feedback). It was recognised that residents that attend planning meetings are a distinct group and that it was critical that they be engaged given the savings options being considered in the review. Overall, it was felt that a number of things could be done to ensure better collaboration with communities around planning decision making. Focus group participants made it clear that taking planning away from community councils would not be well received without compensating actions to support community inputs into the planning process. Significantly, it was not felt that people were necessarily attached to decision-making at community councils, but rather that they wanted a clear and well-planned process, transparent access to information, meaningful dialogue and the opportunity to input in advance. Maintaining the ability of local people to influence local planning decisions is seen as very important.

PLANNING AND LOCALISM

Shaping the Recommendations – points to consider

9. The Commission is requested to make a recommendation on the options outlined:

- Model A - remain the same
- Model B - delete planning from community councils
- Model C - introduce a one sub-committee model; or,
- Model D - introduce a two sub-committees model.

10. If members wish to recommend a sub-committee model a decision on the proposed sub-committee models, or variation of, needs to be suggested (see separate briefing note on planning issues).

11. If the commission recommend removal of the planning function, members may wish to consider making a recommendation suggesting a strong consultative role for community councils to enable local people to influence local planning applications and, that if the budget allows, in the future planning decisions are returned to community councils.

12. That in light of the involvement of some community councils in the development of area actions plan such as the Canada Water Area Action Plan and Aylesbury Area Action Plan, that the constitution includes a specific consultative role on planning policy.

13. That the constitutional steering panel be recommended to consider any necessary constitutional changes.

14. Depending on the decisions taken in relation to the preceding recommendations, the Commission may wish to consider the following suggested ways of strengthening the link between planning decision-making and community councils:
- More effective information transfer between community councils and planning meetings e.g. having a list of planning decisions at community councils
 - Each ward to appoint a lead member on planning

6 ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

- 6.1. The community councils have decision making powers in relation to environment and transport functions. Community councils take decisions on: Cleaner, Greener Safer funding allocations, traffic management functions and highways and lighting capital schemes. Community councils also have an established consultation role in relation to transport and have been consulted on the Transport Plan and Transport for London (TfL) funding plans. Officers from transport regularly attend community councils from a consultative and decision making perspective. A full summary of the decision making and consultative roles is set out in Appendix 3.
- 6.2. The committee were advised that the Street Action Team, which had a more frequent input in community council meetings, had been deleted so street audit reports were no longer brought to community council meetings. Officers from Environment no longer attended community council meetings on a regular basis.
- 6.3. The commission were informed that Cleaner, Greener, Safer was being reviewed by the cabinet member for transport, environment and recycling and that options for different models of devolved decision making were being put forward including:
- Providing grants – involving small sums of money with decision by either cabinet member, community council or ward member.
 - Capacity building – working with communities and local groups
 - Engagement – e.g. public vote.
- 6.4. Members considered the options of devolved decision making to individual Members at ward level. Some felt that the current system worked well at the moment and could not see a case to change the system unless sufficient reductions in costs could be made. Officers clarified that any such savings would not impact on the savings the Democracy Commission was seeking. The cabinet member attended the commission when it considered environment and transport and sought the commission's views on how the community councils would administer CGS in the future.
- 6.5. Members of the commission were advised of the important role the community councils had played in the consultation process on the Transport Plan. The community councils had highlighted schemes of local importance before a final decision was taken by cabinet earlier in the year.
- 6.6. Officers requested that the commission review some of the transport decision making functions. An example given was local disabled parking bays which although approval of bays is reserved to community councils the allocation of places is actually based on a borough wide criteria.
- 6.7. Another area of decision making which would merit review was community councils involvement in controlled parking zone decisions in light of the recent changes to the constitution to make strategic transport and CPZ issues decision making a matter for the relevant cabinet member. Currently the same CPZ proposal could be considered at different stages by a community council on no less than three occasions: (1) to agree in principle the consultation plan on a CPZ, (2) report back on consultation and (3) finally a report on final

design of the scheme. Officers suggested that this could be reduced by officers producing a consultation plan and reverting back to members at the final design stage. In response to a question officers advised that consultation plans are rarely changed.

- 6.8. A similar approach on consultation policy on could also be applied to traffic management orders.
- 6.9. The commission welcomed any proposals to rationalise decision making in the way proposed by officers.

Consultation

- 6.10. With regard to environment and transport issues, participants in the consultation were not necessarily aware of whether they were being consulted around a formal decision, or a part of a regular consultation process. However people did value having a say in relation to environment and transport issues that affect their areas.

ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

Shaping the Recommendations – points to consider

- 15. The Commission is requested to consider if it wishes to make any recommendation relating to the administration of CGS
- 16. That local non-strategic traffic management functions are rationalised as outlined above e.g. where borough wide criteria exist, simplifying the number of decisions required, considering the final design proposals, etc

7 ENGAGEMENT

- 7.1. At the August meeting, Commission members were presented a range of case studies demonstrating the way in which community councils have successfully engaged residents in local level decision-making, job fairs, community cohesion events and consultations on regeneration projects – among other things.
- 7.2. The aim has been to make community councils, ‘more than a meeting’ through the use of such approaches as themed meetings, alternative venues, interactive voting, facilitated workshops and alternative times e.g. at weekends.
- 7.3. Although there has been no significant rise in the average attendance at community council meetings, the fact that such a large number continue to attend is of itself significant. Members of Commission have been made aware of the strength of feeling from this cohort; although the Commission has also received evidence that these meetings shouldn’t be overloaded with consultation requests and should try to remain focused on a specific theme or activity.

Areas of consensus

- 7.4. Members of the Commission have expressed that they value community councils as a way to engage with residents. The use of themed meetings and alternating meeting venues and times are methods of increasing engagement that the Commission have identified as proven.
- 7.5. The commission noted that the times and dates of meetings and the input of locally active people were important in increasing attendance at meetings.
- 7.6. In considering the areas for potential savings members of the commission have looked at the current levels of engagement support. Officers have advised that making savings in this area would have some impact because there would not be dedicated officer resources available to support the current range of activities to make meetings more engaging e.g. themed activities, job fair, follow-up to meetings, supporting sub-groups, etc. Depending on the extent of any reduction this could also impact on the administrative support provided to run the Community Council Fund.

Consultation

- 7.7. The engagement role of community councils is clearly valued by residents and members. For many people who attend community council, it is the chance to find out what is going on in their area and meet with local councillors that brings them to meetings. If meetings were solely devoted to decision-making, without a focus on responding to issues of local interest, or basing them around popular themes, this may have an affect on attendance levels.

ENGAGEMENT

Shaping the recommendations – points to consider

17. Delivering 'more than a meeting' requires significant officer resources and will therefore be affected by any reduction from the current level of staffing. Furthermore, resident interest may diminish if the meetings were solely devoted to decision making without a focus on responding to issues of local interest.
18. The Commission will need to consider what key principles of good community engagement should be prioritised in the context of the decisions it takes on savings.

8 CONSULTATION WITH RESIDENTS AND MEMBERS

- 8.1. The main aim of the consultation process was to hear from residents who attend and value community councils to ensure that their views were fed into the decision-making process. Over a four month period residents were invited to have their say, through the council website, at two rounds of community council meetings (June and September), and through email networks.
- 8.2. The consultation methods used were:
- Focus groups (including people who don't attend community councils to ascertain barriers to getting involved)
 - Questionnaires
 - Presentations and interactive voting at community councils.
- 8.3. Workshops and focus groups were utilised to also gather the views of Chairs and Vice-Chairs and officers who work on or with community councils.
- 8.4. As previously mentioned, the public consultation had a specific target audience – people who go to community councils – which is a relatively small section of the population of the borough. Despite the aforementioned efforts to enable broad engagement across this group, it is felt that the consultation process would have been enhanced if more residents across all community council areas had taken part.
- 8.5. Nevertheless, members of the Commission have indicated that the input obtained from residents who have participated in the consultation is valued and appreciated, and provides some useful insights to inform the decision-making process.
- 8.6. The results at various stages of our qualitative research were presented to the Commission at its August, September and November meetings.

Resident Focus Groups

- 8.7. To explore the community council review in detail with selected residents, four focus groups were held in July 2011. The borough was split between north and south and six regular attendees or one-off/irregular attendees were invited to each focus group to explore what improvements could be made to community councils, and how savings could best be made. The actual attendance figures for the focus groups are as follows:

Regular attendees (south)	6 people
Regular attendees (north)	4 people
One-off/non-attendees (south)	4 people
One-off/non-attendees (north)	1 person

- 8.8. The full feedback report is included at Appendix 5, but here are the points in summary:
- Several residents we consulted felt there should be greater flexibility and resident involvement in setting agendas

- Residents made some useful suggestions around improving how minutes are handled to make it clearer to residents how issues are being followed up
 - Many participants felt that the diversity within the community was not adequately reflected at community council meetings, and that this should be actively addressed
 - It was felt that there was room for improvement in terms of how meetings were chaired and that that this would help reduce the length of meetings
 - There were a number of comments in relation to when and how meetings are held and the need to be more flexible. People wanted to be on a more equal footing with members, e.g. with more workshops and roundtable seating
 - People wanted more time devoted to public questions, and for these to potentially be earlier on in the meeting
 - There was a strong feeling that consultations should be handled better, with criticism of over-use of powerpoint, and the lack of feedback
 - Weekend or daytime meetings should be held from time to time to allow more people to attend.
- 8.9. In terms of savings, focus group participants understood the need to make savings, and on seeing the figures felt that savings could be reasonably made in terms of publicity and marketing budgets, venue and equipment hire and refreshments at meetings.
- 8.10. Residents at the focus groups felt strongly that having fewer meetings per year was the most preferred option for making a substantial contribution to the savings. Having larger community council areas was the least preferred option.

Questionnaires

- 8.11. Questionnaires were distributed at community council meetings in June and September and announcements were made at meetings to encourage residents to fill them out. An online survey was also available on the website, and neighbourhoods team officers distributed questionnaires electronically to local contacts e.g. TRAs and other resident groups.
- 8.12. Having extended the timeframe for questionnaire responses following an initial disappointing response, 83 questionnaires were completed across all community council areas. If you take the average number of people who have attended community councils in 2011, this represents a response rate of nearly 20%¹.
- 8.13. The main findings from the questionnaires can be summarised as follows:

¹ Using the average community council attendance in 2011 so far, which is 60 people as a target audience per area, and applying it across all areas.

- People value many different things about community councils, such as being able to discuss and influence the outcome of local issues, and find out about their local area.
- The local nature of the issues and decisions for discussion is very important
- Approximately 60% of respondents think that community councils perform well across the three areas of:
 - decision-making
 - engagement and participation
 - consultation
- About a quarter of respondents think that community councils are only average and around 10% of respondents think that community councils are poor, or very poor.
- In terms of improvements to community councils, the main suggestions were:
 - Keep them as they are
 - Less items/keep to time
 - Fewer presentations
- In terms of reducing costs at community councils, respondents expressed most support for reducing venue and equipment costs and reducing activities.
- Respondents least preferred the options of having fewer meetings and larger community council areas in equal measures – so there was no clear consensus around the areas for making substantial savings in terms of the questionnaires.
- In terms of examples of how residents have influenced decisions at community councils, the Cleaner, Greener, Safer and Community Council Fund schemes were frequently cited. These were closely followed by being able to influence planning and traffic and transport decision making.

Feedback from September round of community councils

8.14. Chairs and Vice-Chairs of community councils were approached with regard to having an agenda slot at the September 2011 round of meetings to discuss the review of community councils. Three community councils – Walworth, Peckham and Nunhead & Peckham Rye (which actually took place in November), conducted interactive voting sessions which enabled residents to provide quantitative feedback that could contribute to the review. Here are the numbers of people voting in each location:

Walworth	46 people voted
Nunhead and Peckham Rye	26 people voted
Peckham	29 people voted

8.15. Some community councils held brief question and answer sessions, which mainly provoked questions around the review process, rather than feedback

around improvements or savings. Other areas declined to have an agenda slot on the review. In such areas, residents were encouraged to fill in questionnaires so that their views could be captured elsewhere.

- 8.16. Due to the fact that the review was handled in a range of different ways, it is difficult to draw clear parallels or conclusions across areas. However, across the three areas that did conduct interactive voting sessions, it is possible to say that:
- In terms of what people most value about community councils, finding out what is happening in their local area came out top
 - In terms of what people think needs most improving, both more community input to agendas and better feedback were most popular
 - In terms of preferred ways of making savings, having fewer meetings a year received the most votes

Workshop with Chairs and Vice-Chairs

- 8.17. At the workshop with Chairs and Vice-Chairs of community councils, value was attached to community councils in relation to the decision-making, consultation and engagement roles of community councils. It was felt that they were an effective way to empower communities.
- 8.18. Chairs felt that improvements could be made in terms of reaching out to a broader demographic of the local population and that themed meetings and workshops were popular and worked well.
- 8.19. There was a strong feeling that the way in which consultations are done needed to be improved, particularly in terms of use of powerpoint presentations and improved public speaking skills.
- 8.20. Chairs and Vice-Chairs were willing to consider various options of making savings within their own specific area budgets e.g. in terms of refreshments, publicity, venue hire and equipment costs.

Consultation – predominant themes

- 8.21. There were some clear areas of agreement amongst residents, members and staff (who were also consulted):
- People value community councils; both to discuss but also have an influence over local issues
 - Views differ as to whether this needs to be linked to formal decision-making powers or not, but emphasis seems to be more on transparent and timely access to information, having a say in the decision-making process, and being informed of an outcome
 - A number of improvements could be made to increase engagement e.g. better feedback around outcomes, stricter management of agendas, changing format and times of meetings, improved resident input to agendas, less formality
 - People understand the need to make savings, but views differ on how this

should be done. Whilst most people were willing to accept savings around venue and equipment hire or publicity, there was little consensus about how substantive savings could be made. Although participants in the focus group clearly preferred having fewer meetings, this was not the case in terms of the questionnaires. It is therefore difficult to draw clear conclusions as to people's preferences for how significant savings can be made.

- Restrict use of powerpoint presentations – quality varies and not seen as engaging
- Need to attract a more representative group of local people to meetings – smarter publicity to bring in new audiences
- More notice in advance of meetings, and of issues to be discussed (e.g. consultations)
- Value of local knowledge in planning decisions.

RESIDENT, MEMBER, OFFICER CONSULTATION

Shaping the Recommendations – points to consider

19. That the commission note that all of the following points to consider have potential resource and logistical issues, which should be considered in the context of the overall approach taken to identifying savings.
20. Community councils should look at various ways to improve engagement of a more representative cross-section of people in their local area. However, as previously mentioned, all of these potential areas require officer support and therefore have significant cost implications. Ways to improve engagement include:
 - more flexibility around meeting times e.g. weekend meetings
 - varying the use of local venues
 - increasing the use of workshops to encourage debate and dialogue
 - enabling residents to have more influence over the agenda setting process
 - having question time earlier on in agendas
 - stricter chairing to enable balanced input from residents
 - keeping the length of meetings within a time limit e.g. two hours
 - better use of online forums and social media
21. Introducing less formality to meetings was another popular suggestion made and would compliment the desire to improve engagement. People have expressed a preference for a horse-shoe or semi-circular seating arrangement at meetings (with further semi-circular rows behind), to create less “distance” between local people and members.
22. Another suggestion is that officers explore ways to simplify the paperwork to make it more accessible. Either way, plain English summaries of information items could be produced, provided adequate officer resource is available.

23. Residents see the Cleaner, Greener, Safer and Community Fund schemes as evidence of them having an influence on local decisions. Having a say over how council funds are allocated at a local level is valued and recognised as really putting power into the hands of residents. Community councils should be encouraged to develop upon this model of developing community capacity, through approaches such as community or participatory budgeting. These approaches align strongly with central government localism and neighbourhood-led agendas.
24. Residents value having a say on local issues, including consultations, but want a more structured process to ensure they are given transparent access to information, an appropriate timeframe to influence a decision, and receive feedback.
25. A critical area for residents was to improve feedback channels between the council and local people in relation to public questions or queries in relation to consultations or decisions. One way to do this would be to an action point summary in the minutes of each meeting (also available online), covering the following. There would be some officer and associated development costs:
- The issue or question raised by resident
 - Who it has been sent to for a response and the timeframe
 - What the response was
 - Action that has been taken

9 OTHER ISSUES

Sponsorship

The Commission ruled out the viability of seeking sponsorship for community council meetings because of the lack of a corporate framework and legal issues. They also noted that it would not bring significant savings.

The Commission requested that the Justgiving model of match-funding of public contributions to charitable organisations be given further consideration when a corporate framework for sponsorship is in place.

PA system

The commission received a report on the budget allocated to the cost of a public address (PA) system used at main community council and occasional local planning committee meetings. The commission was advised that in 2010/11 there was a budget under spend of approximately £9,000 in this area. This sum is available as a contribution to the savings target and included in the budget section of this report (see Table 4). An information gathering exercise was conducted by officers to check the competitiveness of the current provider and members considered this information in closed session. Members agreed that it was most cost effective to continue hiring a system rather than purchasing and requested that further work be carried out by officers to see if additional savings could be made through a procurement exercise, whilst maintaining the standard of sound at meetings.

Shaping the Recommendations – points to consider

SPONSORSHIP

26. That the Commission recommends that options be explored around maximising the use of volunteers to assist with relevant support roles at community councils, e.g. registration and the utilisation of free venues where possible.
27. That the Justgiving model of corporate match-funding of public contributions to charitable organisations be given further consideration when a corporate framework for sponsorship is in place.

PA SYSTEM

28. That the commission notes the saving of £9,000 for PA system and request that officers carry out further investigations to see if additional savings can be made.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

To be completed when report is finalised.

APPENDICES

Note: This is a list of the appendices to be included in the final report.

Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference and Membership

Appendix 2 – Democracy Commission Work Plan

Appendix 3 - Constitution - Extract on Community Councils

Appendix 4 - Community Council budgets

Appendix 5 – Feedback from Consultation

Appendix 6 – Planning sub-committee options

CONSULTATION

ADD Consultation Report considered in November 2011

Resident focus group on planning

A dedicated planning focus group was held at Tooley Street in early September. It was recognised that residents that attend planning meetings are a distinct group and that it was critical that they be engaged given the savings options being considered in the review. We had an unprecedented level of interest in this session, and as the attendance swelled to 23 people, it became more of a workshop than a focus group per se.

The following is a general summary of the issues discussed:

Access to information

- People highlighted the lack of information in relation to planning decision making, in terms of the process, application itself, and the Statement of Community Involvement
- Plans should be easily accessible online and on request
- There were also queries about the quality of information, and concerns about partiality and accuracy of information presented
- It was felt that there was a lack of feedback if people did send in comments in regard to consultations, or pose questions to the planning department. They didn't know who the relevant officers were
- An inconsistency around the posting of notices was also highlighted
- The manual developed by officers is also not easily accessible

Lack of focus on resident engagement/consultation

- There is frustration that residents are only given limited opportunity to input or comment at meetings, as opposed to officers for example. It was stated that this contrasted with the national guidelines which should allow 3-4 minutes for objectors, applicants and supporters.
- Overwhelming focus on "buildings" rather than "community" – feeling that the engagement aspect was missing i.e. no space for local community to debate collaboratively with planning officers in advance
- It was mentioned that other local authorities enabled local organisations and people to have more input during meetings and that Southwark should follow best practice

Role of councillors

- Frustration that local councillors, who know about the areas cannot vote

Overall, it was felt that a number of things could be done to ensure better collaboration with communities around planning decision making. Taking planning away from community councils would not be well received without compensating actions to support community inputs into the planning process.

Significantly, it was not felt that people were necessarily attached to decision-making at community councils, but rather that they wanted a clear and well-planned process, transparent access to information, meaningful dialogue and the opportunity to input in advance. Maintaining the ability of local people to influence local planning decisions is seen as very important.