

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMUNITY 10 NOVEMBER 2009

EXECUTIVE 24 NOVEMBER 2009

PROPOSALS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek the views of the Committee on proposals for the Council's approach to Community Involvement to be presented to Executive.
- 1.2 To seek views on the identified priority neighbourhoods of the city as a focus for one aspect of the council's involvement work.
- 1.3 To seek views on the future format of Community Forums.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 My Neighbourhood was an 18 month pilot project, launched in June 2007, aiming to increase resident participation at neighbourhood level in four areas in the city: Exwick, St. David's, Newtown/Polsloe and Kings Heath/Clyst Heath. Members will recall receiving progress and evaluation reports on the pilot at their November 2008 meeting. The evaluation report identified that the project had been successful in its original objectives and had successfully increased the involvement of local people in the work of the partnerships, had enabled residents to communicate more effectively with public sector agencies and had increased residents' wider involvement in their neighbourhood.
- 2.2 Some of the main drivers for this work are:
 - To strengthen and enhance the role of ward members as strategic leaders in the governance of their localities. Community engagement provides extra opportunities for local people to work with their councillors to influence decisions and thus enhance both participatory and representative local democracy.
 - To support the implementation of the Duty to Involve which came into force in April 2009 and requires Councils to 'embed a culture of engagement and empowerment' (Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act) It is designed to ensure that local people have greater opportunities to influence decision making.
 - The Comprehensive Area Assessment where the council is assessed on '*how well is the organisation delivering its priority services, outcomes and improvements that are important to local people*'.
 - Expectations from the public to have a greater involvement in shaping the places in which they live and improving services that impact on their locality.

"Community Engagement and Empowerment is important because it can help to deliver:

Stronger communities – resilient communities with strong social networks and active citizens taking responsibility for their own well-being

Better services – services informed and influenced by communities so that they meet needs effectively and efficiently

Vibrant democracy - representative democracy improved through active participation.”

(From NEA framework for an ideal empowering authority pg4 (Improvement and Development Agency)

2.3 Community empowerment is concerned with creating the conditions by which local communities feel they can influence local public services. It has taken on an increasingly higher profile with government and national policy makers because recent research indicates that the public is disaffected with local government. It showed that too many people feel they have little or no influence over the public bodies that affect their everyday lives and believe they can play little part in decision making. For example:

- Nationally, more than seven in ten (71%) of citizens feel they have **no** influence over decisions affecting their local areas. In Exeter the figure is 72.4%.
- Nationally, only 45.4% of people are satisfied with the performance of their local council. In Exeter the figure is 53.5%, better than the national figure but still leaves nearly one in two (46.5%) less than satisfied.
- Only one third of the population vote in local elections (in Exeter the figure from 2008 is 37.8%), and 41% of those who do not claim that it is because they do not think it will make a difference.
- Residents in deprived areas are the most alienated from the political system.

“Community involvement and engagement is not new to local government but what has changed is the emphasis central government is placing on empowerment – and the expectation that councils will take a more strategic and systematic approach to placing community involvement at the heart of everything they do.”

(Source: Councillor’s guide. The Essential Guide for all New Councillors 2009/10, pg 67, Improvement and Development Agency)

3.0 Proposal

3.1 Consultation on the proposed model for Community Involvement took place with the following groups and individuals:

- Strategic Management Team
- Departmental Management Teams
- Portfolio Holder Housing and Community Involvement
- Leader of the Council
- Voluntary sector partners – Exeter CVS, Exeter Community Initiatives, Living Options, Ivy Project, Age Concern
- Devon and Cornwall Police
- Political group leaders
- Resident and Community groups who were invited to comment on proposals at a St Sidwells/Devon Link event on the 12 September
- Human Resources Service

A visit took place to learn from the experience of Gloucestershire County Council who have implemented a similar model of community engagement since January 2009. At the time of the visit, feedback was that the project was proving to be effective with a good response from communities and partner agencies. “Overall, the presence of Area Lead Officers

(ALOs) at neighbourhood meetings has been welcomed by representatives of the community, Police and other partners. It is felt that we have 'put GCC on the map' and strengthened links with the community and partners. Feedback from neighbourhood meetings has been very positive and there is general agreement that there is a need for the ALO role."

(Report to Corporate Management Team 23.09.09 Gloucestershire County Council.)

4.0 Proposed Community Involvement Model

4.1 My Neighbourhood PACT

Aim: To work in partnership with the community police teams in the city as part of the **Partners and Communities Together (PACT)** project, local councillors, resident and community associations and other public service organisations (DCC, Housing Associations, Exeter University, Health Services, Voluntary and Community Sector etc) to provide opportunities for effective participation from individuals and communities to get and exchange information to improve services and neighbourhoods.

- 4.1.1 Feedback from members, residents and officers has helped to inform and develop this proposal for the continuation of our involvement work. The proposals are based on the learning from the pilot but takes account of resources now available. The My Neighbourhood Pilot cost £51k over 18 months (for a contract with the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) to deliver capacity building support to communities). There was an additional £20k for community grants and another £9k in core running costs to support the cost of venue hire, publicity and refreshments.
- 4.1.2 For 2009/10, there is existing revenue funding of £25,000 to support Community Involvement work. This proposal is based on a model that works within this budget (plus a c/f of £8,000 from the pilot stage over the next twelve months.) This proposed model is based on the recognition that it would be beneficial to work alongside the established Partners and Communities Together (PACT) model delivered by the police – a nationally recognised approach that is already established in communities across Exeter. This would present the opportunity for a more 'joined up' approach to working with communities, It would enable us to bring efficiencies into the work through shared resources and expertise, it would help the city council to target services more effectively at communities expressed needs and also it reflects best practice in partnership working.
- 4.2 PACT meetings and activities in neighbourhoods take place once a month. Some of these take place in local community venues, other sessions take place on street corners or alongside existing community meetings that are organised by resident/ community associations. The City Council engagement process would seek to work alongside existing formal and more informal structures.
- 4.3 It is proposed that officers from across the City Council will be selected (through a recruitment process) and supported to attend local area PACT/ My Neighbourhood meetings. The Police deliver PACT through 17 identified policing areas (including the city centre and Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital). (**See map on page 9 for Neighbourhood Police teams areas in Exeter.**) However, the proposal suggests that the City Council takes a 'pilot' approach to the roll out of the project in order to understand the work involved to ensure that it can be adequately resourced. It is suggested that of the 17 areas of the City that the police currently deliver PACT, the City Council participates in initially half of these areas. This would suggest we recruit up to eight officers as Area Liaison Officers (ALOs) to deliver the My Neighbourhood /PACT work in the first 12 months of the pilot.

The ALO role will be an opportunity for officers to develop new skills, experience a wide range of issues and work closely with elected members, community groups and residents and partner organisations. **(More information on the role of the ALO and the required skills is outlined in Appendix One.)** The ALO role will assist officers to have a wider understanding of the council's business and to develop 'connections' across the Council and the City.

The role would need to be managed within the officer's existing role and hours. It is essential that officers have the full support of their managers and recognised that the role gives added value not only to the individual officer's development, but also to the department and indeed the whole council.

- 4.4 The recruitment process will be open to all officers across the council who have the potential and appropriate skills to take on the role. An honorarium of £1,000 will be paid as remuneration for the task in lieu of additional hours worked. The role will be initially for one year and must have the support of the relevant Line Manager and Director. It is estimated that the role will take around one to two days per month (mostly evening meetings and occasional weekends). Training and follow up activities that are related to the role will be part of the officers' core working hours and support will be provided by the Community Involvement Officer.
- 4.5 The focus of the work will be on wider community issues and priorities, although where individuals have specific issues regarding council services, these will be fed into the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system operated by the Customer Service Centre.

5.0 Resources

- 5.1 The project has £25,000 in 2009/10 plus £8,000 carried forward from 2008/9. It is proposed that the breakdown of expenditure is as follows:

Detail	Amount
Honorarium for Area Liaison Officers	£8,000
To support community meetings costs; venue hire, publicity, training for officers and partners and contributions to voluntary and community sector partners to support the capacity building requirements of new and existing community and resident associations.	£10,000
For a community kitty where groups across the city can bid for small community grants (up to £500) to sustain or kick start new community initiatives or for small capital expenditure projects (such as community notice boards or minor landscaping projects) that encourage a sense of pride and belonging and stronger communities.	£15,000
Total	£33,000

It is proposed that the community kitty is open to all groups across the city, not just the groups in the My Neighbourhood/ PACT areas. A Participatory Budgeting (PB) exercise would be used twice a year, where representatives from communities across the city, plus representative councillors from each group would decide on which groups should be allocated the grant (following an application process). It would be important to hold the PB event fairly regularly so that groups were not waiting on the outcome of their bid for too long and to ensure groups were kept on board with the community engagement process. It is hoped that other agencies may be able to contribute to the community grants, such as

the police, housing associations and possibly the business community. (In the My Neighbourhood Pilot an additional £6,000 was contributed to communities from local businesses, national suppliers, county councillors and the police, and an additional £10,000 was raised through Awards for All as a result of the My Neighbourhood work in Exwick).

5.2 The project would be evaluated at the end of the first twelve months (December 2010) to determine the effectiveness of the approach and to decide funding required for any future roll out of the initiative. Interim reports would be provided after the first six-month period.

5.3 Members may wish to note that The South West Regional Improvement & Efficiency Partnership (RIEP) invited Exeter City Council and other Local Authorities to bid for funding up to £12,500 to support initiatives that demonstrate good practice in the area of community engagement and responsiveness. As part of the bid, councils were required to demonstrate what had already been achieved in terms of effective partnership working, clear leadership and how it has impacted on changes to work practices across the organisation.

The successful authorities (two will be chosen across the South West region) will be asked to share their good practice to other authorities and partnerships across the region. The city council has applied for the funding to support the following activities:

Detail	Amount
Joint training for Community Engagement partners	£4,000
Communities First Information Day	£ 2,500
Capacity building support for community and resident associations	£4,500
Participatory Budgeting event	£1,500
Total	£12,500

The SWRIEP Programme Board will select two authorities at their Board meeting on 28 October. Authorities will be notified on the 29 October.

6.0 Internal mechanisms to progress issues

6.1 The proposal is to develop a pro-forma case sheet to record and monitor progress on actions **for the City Council**. Individual resident issues would be fed into the existing Customer Relation Management System (CRM) process to avoid duplication of tracking systems. Issues for other authorities would be passed onto an appropriate contact. (DCC have agreed to identify a lead contact for the authority plus officer contacts in each directorate).

For community-wide issues, the City Council will adopt the PACT approach of working to three priorities identified by each area at any one time. The priorities would be for the community, not for each agency, therefore there would be times when there are three issues for the City Council to address, and other occasions when there were none. The ALO role at this time would be to continue to support the engagement and development process within their identified community. The priorities would be tracked and reviewed at each meeting to identify progress and decide when issues can be moved off the priority list to leave space for new priorities to be identified.

It is proposed that we pilot a Traffic light system to identify priorities for action within a given timescale (similar to the system adopted by the Community Tasking Action Team)—Red for issues to be addressed in the short term (one to three months), Amber for Issues to be addressed within a medium timescale (3 - 6 months) and green for issues that are longer term. This gives the City Council a systematic approach to monitor progress and to be able to identify any actions taken in response to residents concerns. It also gives a

transparent process to be able to give reports back to residents at subsequent meetings and on the city council website.

Administrative support for the project will be provided from within the Chief Executive's Department.

In addition to existing duties, the Community Involvement Officer will be responsible for the development and support of the ALOs, liaising with Heads of Service and partners to resolve challenging issues, provide cover and backup for community meetings when an ALO can't attend and reporting progress of the programme and co-ordinating the project on behalf of the City Council.

Reporting back to communities is crucial to the success of the project. This will be done using city council tools including the Citizen, website, and using other media as appropriate.

7.0 Priority Neighbourhoods and the Place Survey

- 7.1 The Place Survey replaces the Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) surveys conducted in 2000, 2003 and 2006. The main aim of the survey is to measure satisfaction with local public services. Data from the place survey will form part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) with a number of questions producing National Indicator scores and others relating to the overall performance of the council.

For the purposes of this report, analysis from the Place Survey identifies where residents live who are least satisfied with the Council and local police force and who feel the least informed, engaged and able to influence decisions. These areas correlate with the priority neighbourhoods as identified in the Geography of Deprivation (ECC April 2008) as they tend to score higher rates of deprivation.

- 7.2 The eight areas of Exeter proposed for Community Involvement in the first 12 months of the pilot are identified below. (Members will note that some wards are broken down into two areas where they represent a particularly large ward – There may be an argument for identifying further breakdown of other large wards eg Exwick – but the project is based on identifying eight areas in total in this pilot stage).

1. **Priory** - focus on Burnthouse Lane (Trees and Poets)/Rifford Road
2. **Priory** - Countess Wear – Glasshouse Lane
3. **Newtown**
4. **Cowick**
5. **Wilmington**
6. **Exwick**
7. **St. Thomas**
8. **Pinhoe**

(See map on page 11 of Exeter identifying these areas)

Wards excluded from this list that feature high levels of deprivation:

St David's the city centre has proven hard to engage and St David's Neighbourhood Partnership working effectively in partnership with local councillors and police

Mincinglake already a lot of very effective partnership work in this ward via Tenant Liaison Manager, city councillors, police and the Beacon Heath Community Project.

Feedback from the Neighbourhood Police teams supports the eight areas identified in 7.2 as most likely to benefit from a city council community involvement investment.

7.3 The Social Health and Inclusion Partnership (SHIP) has identified that they and the rest of the Local Strategic Partnership should work to address inequalities by focusing resources in areas of the city with the greatest levels of deprivation. By focusing the work of the My Neighbourhood/ PACT initiative on these areas, it would support our commitment to addressing inequalities in the city.

7.4 When city council officers were asked for feedback on areas that would benefit from a community involvement focus, the areas particularly identified were as follows:

- Priory – Burnthouse lane
- Buddle Lane/Newman Road/Dunsford Road square area of Cowick
- Summerway area of Pinhoe
- Countess Wear – Glasshouse Lane

(Officers who contributed: Tenant Liaison Manager, Parks and Open Spaces Manager, Cleansing Services Manager, Community Safety Partnership Co-ordinator.)

8.0 Community Forum

8.1 Consultation with the Wavelength panel and the Community Forum mailing list members gave no conclusive results between the two models.

The two models were a Question Time format and a Thematic approach. It is suggested that we introduce four thematic forums and one Question Time a year.

8.2 There is a recognition that it would be useful to do further consultation with LSP partners on the future themes and format of the forums

9.0 Recommendations

9.1 That the committee gives their views on proposals for the Community Involvement including the roll out of My Neighbourhood/PACT into neighbourhoods identified through the Place Survey results 2009 and with reference to the Geography of Deprivation Priority neighbourhoods.

9.2 That the Community Forum model proposed is agreed and that further consultation takes place with LSP partners on the thematic areas and format

BINDU ARJOON
ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DEPARTMENT

Date: 14 October 2009

APPENDIX ONE

Identified Role and Skills for Area Liaison Officers

Role:

- To be the principal point of contact for the My Neighbourhood PACT project within a named area. To be the named point of contact to help residents and community groups link to the council.
- Work with officers, members and partners to co-ordinate information and feedback to relevant individuals within directorates or partner organisations.
- Attend meetings in the identified area (usually once a month), and where appropriate identify fellow officers who also need to attend.
- Help directorates link into local communities particularly on consultation and service delivery.
- Work closely with partners and other key stakeholders in the area. Issues can rarely be dealt with by one organisation and usually find a better solution when solved in partnership.
- Encourage and support local people to be more actively involved in the wider community.
- Share issues, experiences and learning with other area leads and influence the development of the council's programme of Community Involvement.

Skills, Experience and Qualities:

- Experience of face to face work with residents in current or previous role (or voluntary experience of supporting a community initiative)
- Effective communication skills with residents, elected members and partners to manage expectations and present clear information
- Ability to build trust with residents and partner agencies and to motivate and reinforce the value of participation
- To champion and promote improvements for communities in partnership with other identified key residents and partners
- An understanding and commitment to challenging the factors which contribute to social exclusion
- Open and participatory style, and commitment to community participation
- Ability to work flexibly, both as part of a team and own initiative
- Ability to work flexible hours, including evenings and occasional weekends