EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL
THURSDAY, 24TH JANUARY 2013 AT 4.30 PM
IN MEETING ROOM 13, SOUTHFIELDS, LOUGHBOROUGH

AGENDA

1. <u>APOLOGIES</u>

2. <u>NOTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING</u>

    The notes of actions agreed by the Panel at its meeting held on 3rd December 2012 are attached at page 3. The updated Scope Document is attached as an appendix to the report.

3. <u>DRAFT / INTERIM REPORT</u>

    A copy of the draft / interim report is attached at page 11. The Panel is asked if they wish to submit this document as a report or an interim report to the Scrutiny Management Board.

    To assist the Panel with the consideration of the item a paper detailing options for the way forward is attached at page 25.

Panel Membership:
Cllrs Shepherd (Chair), Gaskell, Pacey, Sharp, Smidowicz and Williams.

NOTES OF ACTIONS AGREED BY
EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

MEETING 5: 3rd December 2012

ATTENDED BY: **Councillors:** Shepherd (Chair), Gaskell, Pacey, Sharp and Williams

Officers: D. Tilley and M. Hopkins

APOLOGIES: Councillor Smidowicz

CONSIDERED AT THIS MEETING:

DOCUMENT OR MATTER	ACTIONS AGREED
Action Notes of the meeting held on 29th October 2012 and updated Scrutiny Review Scope Document	Confirmed as a true record.
Witnesses: Councillor David Slater, Leader of Charnwood Borough Council Geoff Parker, Chief Executive of Charnwood Borough Council	That the following Key Issues be identified for consideration as part of the drafting of the Panel's interim report: 1. that provision of a "Route Map" in the form of a step by step guide be made available to provide assistance to communities with understanding the process involved and the agencies to approach when seeking to establish a new community scheme or initiative; 2. that "Case Studies" of community initiatives and projects which have been successful be prepared in order to be publicised and shared as good practice; 3. that Consultation response times be amended to ensure that community groups and parishes would have enough time to consider consultations and provide a meaningful response; 4. that a review of the process for issuing Press Releases be undertaken with a view to targeting these where appropriate, for example, the Birstall Post may be the appropriate organisation to receive press releases concerning initiatives specific to that area; 5. that having received information and responses from communities, the results and reasons for a decision must always be relayed;

	6. that the Council and Councillors take steps to equip Councillors to undertake the community leadership role effectively; and 7. that the following be fed into the Customer Service Strategy, which was currently under review: • "It appeared that services within the Council were isolated from each other and that information was not being shared". • "The Council would benefit greatly if it developed a means of pooling information so that it was readily available to officers undertaking similar or related tasks in the future". • "Consultation and requests for feedback needed to specifically detail what information is required and the preferred format to receive it in".
Timetable for Review	Next meeting to be scheduled in January 2013 – to consider the evidence gathered so far and the responses of the witnesses, the key issues identified to be addressed and to develop an interim report for consideration by Scrutiny Management Board.

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY COUNCILLOR SLATER AND GEOFF PARKER, CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Through discussion with the Panel, Councillor Slater and Geoff Parker provided the following information in response to the questions identified by the Panel from the evidence which had previously been gathered:

Targeting

1. "How can the Council be more responsive to community aspirations identified elsewhere than in priority neighbourhoods?"

It would depend upon the community or group, some would want help to achieve their objective, and others simply want the agencies to do it for them. For example, some communities ask for help setting up a youth organisation, others consider that the Council should simply set one up.

The Borough Council's view was that community initiatives were more successful if the idea and support grew from within the community.

Councillors have an important role to play with identifying groups and with signposting and supporting them with ensuring they fulfil any requirements.

However, different communities have different aspirations and expectations.

Sometimes the Council was accused of not providing information, such as not feeding back on planning applications; however, decisions were always published on the website. A common criticism of those who have responded to consultation and feedback was that information was provided but there was never a response setting out how the information had been considered.

The Borough Council needs to ensure that expectations among communities were managed, there was not a huge amount of funding available, yet where a community had the passion for an idea the Council, as an enabler, would be able to assist with achieving those aspirations.

2. "To what extent can the successes from targeted and other current work be communicated and applied across the Council so that more communities can benefit?"

A Route map and directory would help, however it was important to consider where these would be published and how "hard to reach groups" would be reached.

The Council had often been involved in many successful community initiatives by being part of planning and support framework when these initiatives were launched. Due to the pressure on resources, there was a limit to the Council's involvement with community initiatives. Realistically the Council was more likely to react than to be proactive, due to resource constraints.

Examples of good practice and success should be promoted and shared through press releases and case studies. Case studies could be published in Charnwood News.

It was important to sign post people in the right direction to those who were best placed to help, for example, Voluntary Action Charnwood, the Youth Council or Charnwood Together.

The Neighbourhood Planning process was an opportunity for the Council to engage with communities and identify their needs.

Communication and Consultation

3. "How can the Council improve its consultation and communication activity?"

Respondents need more time, e.g. parishes often only meet once a month. In addition, clarity needs to be provided on how the response should be received.

A common criticism of Council consultations was that there was not enough time to provide a considered and well evidenced response; therefore, an extended consultation would benefit both the Council and those being consulted in terms of adding value.

Again, specific consideration needed to be given to how to engage with "hard to reach groups", examples of good practice being the consultations on Housing Management Options, Corporate Plan and Leisure Facilities. The development of a consultation strategy would go some way to avoiding duplication, although it was not always appropriate to link consultations.

However, with some consultations there were unavoidable time constraints, for example, the budget and Council Tax consultation was restricted to January since it had to be set in February with the Government providing the grant settlement in December.

The Council was often consulted by partners in the same was as those partners consulted with members of the public, although initial notice was often given through Charnwood Together.

Feedback already takes place on consultations, the Corporate Plan being published through Charnwood News, and where that did not take place specifically, the information would often be available in other sources, for example, in agendas for Committee meetings. There was not one central place for all information concerning consultations.

Press Releases were often used as a mechanism for raising awareness of a consultation and also promoting action taken.

4. "How does the Council intend to develop its use of social media tools to improve community engagement?"

The Council has a twitter account, which has around 1000 followers. Twitter provide applications to enable its use on a mobile phone and phone applications were available which enabled comments, reporting and feedback.

The Council currently did not have a Facebook account, although some initiatives had Facebook pages. Social media was one of the communication tools in the tool box; it was not the answer to effective communication but was part of it. Social media was in transition and the Council needed to develop skills at the right pace in order to use it effectively while not neglecting other forms of communication.

Partnership Working

5. "*How does partnership working fit into the objectives for community empowerment set out in the Corporate Plan?"*

Charnwood Together and Leicestershire Together were the key partnerships where plans were shared and a common countywide plan was formed.

Not all partnerships were relevant to community empowerment, since partnership working was often about effective inter-agency working. However, some issues were community related and the strategic partnerships included representation from the third and voluntary sectors. Partners were moving to

more personalised service provision where the emphasis was on multi-agency approach, for example, problem families, which was more personalised to the family rather than community focussed.

6. "How can the voluntary sector be encouraged to respond to community aspirations and what should the Council's role in this be?"

The Council engages with the voluntary sector and strategic partners have signed up to the supporting infrastructure. Three years ago, the Council identified the strategic partners for community grants. What the Council would be able to achieve depended upon resources, therefore the focus had to be on quantifying added value.

7. "How can a balance be struck between appropriate governance and making grant funding more easily accessible to support community empowerment?"

The problem was how to make the process easier and less bureaucratic, while avoiding misappropriation of funds.

Those who need to access grants often have some difficulty in applying, the Council provides help, nevertheless there must be an established process and governance procedures need to be in place when dealing with public money. If a grant application was rejected, then a reason would be given in order to assist the applicant with subsequent applications.

Policing the provision of grants to the voluntary sector was difficult, criticism was often received that there was too much scrutiny, yet others criticise that a grant has been awarded and there was limited accountability.

Parish and Town Councils

8. "*How does working with Parish and Town Councils fit into the objectives for community empowerment set out in the Corporate Plan?"*

There was often criticism from parishes that with their schedule of meetings, they were not given enough time to consider and respond to consultations on planning applications.

The Council organises a Parish Clerks Liaison Meeting, were feedback could be given about how working arrangements could be improved. Parish Council's were closer to the community and were better placed to identify initiatives. However, many Parishes did not have the administrative resources to deal with these issues. If it suited parishes, it was possible to increase the number of liaison meetings.

Working with parishes fits in with the Corporate Plan aspirations on partnership working and community transfer. Nevertheless opportunities often look easy but when the detail was considered it becomes harder to deliver, for example, transfer of public conveniences which involved complicated legal agreements over land ownership and third party landowners.

The Borough and parishes work together to empower local communities through community budgets and many Borough Councillors attend Parish Council meetings to provide a communication and liaison link.

9. "How can the Council address the concerns raised by Parish and Town Councils in the evidence they provided to the Panel?"

By being more prescriptive in consultations and offering more time to respond where possible.   Then to relay the decision and the reasons for the decision.

Nevertheless, it was important to encourage parishes to be proactive, since it was often possible for them to find out the information they needed if they requested it.

Role of the council and councillors

10. "What do you see as the role of ward councillors in delivering the objectives in the Corporate Plan in relation to community empowerment?"

Most residents associations have been started by ward councillors. The central role of a ward councillor was that of a community leader and as such they provide the required leadership for empowering their communities.

Borough Councillors should be encouraged to participate in Parish Councils and community and residents groups in order to build local community relations and training should be offered where needed.

The role of the ward Councillor has changed over time and the quality of Councillors vary, it would be important to invest time in Councillor Development since communities looked to their local Councillor for help.

11. "Do you have any initial views regarding the view of the Panel that the following be fed into the Customer Service Strategy that is currently under review?
- *It appeared that services within the Council were isolated from each other and that information was not being shared.*
- *The Council would benefit greatly if it developed a means of pooling information so that it was readily available to officers undertaking similar or related tasks in the future.*
- *Consultation and requests for feedback needed to specifically detail what information is required and the preferred format to receive it in".*

Important part of effective community engagement was effective customer service.   A programme of developing excellence was being introduced through each department since if the customer was satisfied, the customer was gratified. All three points made were positive and should be feed into the emerging Customer Service Strategy.

It was important to recognise good customer standards and challenge ourselves

as to whether we were really achieving them.

It was important again to consider "hard to reach groups", some people find it difficult to use a telephone.   The Council needed to avoid making assumptions based on what we think customers would like and analyse the needs.

Figures on customer satisfaction have increased for five years in a row, statistics state the Council was doing well, although satisfaction with the website was lower.

Good customer service would be underpinned by effective internal working and clearer responsibilities to ensure that information was not being passed around and not actioned.   A project has recently been tackling silo working within the Council, initiatives start across the organisation, yet professional services would be engaged at a late stage to advise.   The silo working project took initiatives to improve communication with key messages being disseminated across the organisation.

OTHER ISSUES RAISED/DISCUSSED AT THIS MEETING:

None.

FURTHER MEETINGS OF THE PANEL:

Meeting 6   January 2013. Details to be confirmed in consultation with the
                    Panel following the meeting.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

No further matters were raised.

REPORT OF THE EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

1.   Background

At a Localism briefing in January 2012, Councillors had considered the 'Ladder of Participation' which showed the stages that should be followed to ensure successful community engagement:

At their meeting held on 21st February 2012, in considering the Localism Act 2011, Policy Scrutiny Group resolved that the Governance and Scrutiny Research Officer liaise with the Chair, Councillor Shepherd, and the Head of Communities and Partnerships with a view to developing a scope document for a scrutiny panel focussed upon empowering communities, to be submitted to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Management Board.

Accordingly, at the Scrutiny Management Board meetings held on 28th March 2012 and 23rd May 2012 it was resolved that the Panel be established, that it commence its work in June 2012, that it be chaired by Councillor Shepherd and that it be monitored by the Policy Scrutiny Group.

The Panel's first meeting took place on 12th July 2012.

2.   Panel Membership

In June 2012 Councillors were invited to put themselves forward to sit on the Panel. All Members that did so were accepted.

Chair: Councillor Shepherd
Councillors: Gaskell, Pacey, Sharp, Smidowicz and Williams.

Panel Members felt that the makeup of the Panel was particularly suitable as it consisted of Members that represented a good cross-section of the varied issues affecting communities within different Wards in the Borough.

3.   Terms of Reference and Reason for Scrutiny

At their first meeting, the Panel agreed that their work should progress on the basis that the following amendments be made to the proposed Terms of Reference:

- Under 2. of the Scope of Item, the term 'Council services' be replaced with 'Council functions'.
- The Reason for Scrutiny be amended as follows to include reference to the Council's recently adopted Corporate Plan 2012-2016:

Therefore, the Terms of Reference and the Reason For Scrutiny followed by the Panel was as follows:

'Scope Of Item / Terms Of Reference

'To review current activity and assist the Council in developing new approaches in the light of the passing of the Localism Act 2011 and the Government's wider localism agenda and of our own Corporate Plan.'

1. Developing an enabling Council focused on how to meet community aspirations.
2. Reviewing the stages in the 'ladder of participation' reached by different Council functions (Informing, Consulting, Involving, Collaborating, Empowering) and where they could reach.

It is proposed that the Panel proceed on the basis of initially selecting a number of services or functions (e.g. provision of services for the young) as test cases in which to review the 'ladder of participation' and the relevant issues identified in the 'What will be Included' section below. This would result in the production of an interim report. The Panel would then continue its work by applying its interim findings to other services and functions so that any of the issues identified in the 'What will be Included' section which were not applicable to the initial group of services and functions could be addressed.

Reason For Scrutiny

To review current activity and assist the Council in developing new approaches in the light of the passing of the Localism Act 2011 and the Government's wider localism agenda and of our own Corporate Plan.'

The latest version of the complete Scope document is attached as an Appendix.

4.   Evidence, Stakeholders and Witnesses

For the purpose of gathering evidence, the Panel decided focus on two elements of the Scope Document.

Witnesses would be asked questions in relation to which rung of the 'ladder of participation' their organisation/service had reached and where they could reach

Members agreed that to gain a true view of how the Council was performing in respect of the Ladder it would be necessary to gain evidence from both internal services and customers of the Council, as well as obtaining a corporate viewpoint.

With that in mind, the Panel received information from the following:

- Sarah Coupe, Children and Young Peoples Strategic Co-ordinator
- Alan Twells, Head of Regulatory Services and Karl Harrison, Street Scene Manager (North)
- Verity Graham, Neighbourhood and Partnership Co-ordinator and Julie Robinson, Head of Neighbourhood Services
- Diane Lockwood, Marios Tinenti Centre, Peel Drive, Loughborough
- Vicky Dawson, Warwick Way Action Group (WAGS), Altogether Place, Loughborough
- Louis Bartlett and Zoe House, Charnwood Youth Council
- Ann Irving, Parish Clerk, Woodhouse Parish Council
- Brenda Snape, Town Clerk and Councillor Joan Tassell, Shepshed Town Council
- Councillor David Slater, Leader of the Council
- Geoff Parker, Chief Executive of the Council

5.   Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment will be included once the Panel has agreed on its final recommendations.

6.   Assessing the Evidence Gained

Following the gathering of evidence, the Panel need to agree upon its future direction and/or make recommendations to the Scrutiny Management Board. The following is a summary of what the Panel learned from witnesses.

The Panel initially defined the successful empowerment of communities as providing them with the motivation and confidence to undertake action to improve their area without the need for the Council to intervene or assist. The Panel also recognised that in some cases individuals wanted an issue resolved not to be empowered.   As a result of the evidence it gathered, the Panel refined its definition of empowerment to include:

- activities by the Council which resulted in the community being able to act on its own and the Council moving away from being involved;

- the Council enabling communities to work better with the Council;
- assisting groups with an issue until it had been addressed and the group was no longer required.

Targeting

It was generally found that people from more affluent areas utilised universal facilities more frequently than those from poorer ones so some targeting was necessary. The Council targeted resources towards areas that displayed the most need but also offered a signposting service to assist groups from areas with less need. There was evidence of success in the former approach (e.g. Altogether Place and the Marios Tinenti Centre) but there appeared to be a more mixed picture in respect of the latter.

The Communities and Partnerships Team worked predominantly in priority neighbourhoods in Loughborough, Mountsorrel and Thurmaston. It was also working in Shepshed, especially on youth-related issues (this work was not mentioned by the Town Council in its evidence).

The work of Charnwood Youth Council provided another example of effective targeting, in this case on a demographic rather than geographical basis. The Panel heard that the work of the Youth Council was more focussed on Loughborough than the other parts of the Borough and that there was the opportunity to get Parish and Town Councils more involved in youth-related issues

The Panel believed that the Council should aim to 'give communities a clearly defined route for bottom-up initiatives'. It seemed that many good services were being offered by the Council but that they were not joined up and therefore efficiencies could be improved upon. A publicly available route map and directory would help communities to understand what was available to them as many were currently unaware. A template should be developed that would allow officers to record the processes followed to complete projects, therefore saving time when a similar project occurred in the future. It was agreed that a Route map and directory would help, however it was important to consider where these would be published and the best way of getting the information to 'hard to reach groups'.

Communication and Consultation

The Panel heard that there had been a reduction in resources available for consultation, for example, work on a toolkit had not been completed. The Panel also heard that there was a lack of discussion between services regarding what consultations were being undertaken to enable the production of a consultation strategy/timetable which could prevent duplication and reduce costs. The general lack of co-ordination and knowledge between Council departments came as a surprise to external witnesses.

Shepshed Town Council raised concerns about the short timeframe that was offered for consultation responses, often not fitting in with the Town Council's decision-making procedures. The Panel were informed that the issue of consultation timescales had been raised at the regular liaison meetings with Parish and Town Council Clerks and a minimum consultation timetable was recommended practice. There was also a feeling that consultation responses were not taken into consideration when decisions were taken (examples of street naming and planning applications were given) and that feedback on the progress of projects was rare. This view was supported by Woodhouse Parish Council but their overall view was that the Borough Council generally did a good job of informing and involving. It was also mentioned that it would be helpful to consultees if documents could be more specific about the information that was sought.

The Panel were also aware of public concerns relating to how public representations were taken into account by the Council. Concerns related specifically to planning applications and evidence on the proportion of properties that were Houses in Multiple Occupation. However, the Neighbourhood Planning process was another opportunity for the Council to engage with communities and identify their needs.

Where engagement work was begun, it often needed to be undertaken several times before individuals felt comfortable responding and a key to empowering communities was finding the most suitable means of engaging with them. The experiences of working with Altogether Place and the Marios Tinenti Centre showed that there might be initial suspicion or resistance to certain types of engagement work. It was also recognised that the necessary approaches could differ between rural and Loughborough wards.

Through the Charnwood Youth Conference the Council had highlighted work required to better communicate with teenagers. It had identified that the Council's website came across as too 'authority based'. The use of social media to engage young people was restricted by organisational policy but it had also been identified that its use could have a negative impact on the relationships between authorities and young people as it was seen as intruding into their social circles. The use of social media to communicate with communities, and particularly young people, would necessarily remain on the agenda as it was the communication method of choice for many residents.

However, with some consultations there were unavoidable time constraints, for example, the budget and Council Tax consultation was restricted to January since it had to be set in February with the Government providing the grant settlement in December.

The Council was often consulted by partners, for example the police and the health service, in the same way as those partners consulted with members of the public, although initial notice was often given through Charnwood Together.

Feedback already took place on consultations, the Corporate Plan being published through Charnwood News, and where that did not take place specifically, the information would often be available in other sources, for example, in agendas for Committee meetings.   There was not one central place for all information concerning consultations.

Press Releases were often used as a mechanism for raising awareness of a consultation and also promoting action taken.

The Council had a twitter account with around 1000 followers.   Twitter provide applications to enable its use on a mobile phone and phone applications were available which enabled comments, reporting and feedback. The Council currently did not have a Facebook account, although some initiatives had Facebook pages. Social media was not seen as the sole answer to effective communication but a part of it. Social media was in transition and the Council needed to develop skills at the right pace in order to use it effectively while not neglecting other forms of communication.

Important part of effective community engagement was effective customer service. A programme of developing excellence was being introduced through each department.

Customer satisfaction figures had increased for five years in a row and statistics showed the Council was doing well, although satisfaction with the website was lower.

Good customer service would be underpinned by effective internal working and clearer responsibilities to ensure that information was being actioned. A project had recently been tackling silo working within the Council with initiatives starting across the organisation.   The silo working project took initiatives to improve communication with key messages being disseminated across the organisation.

Partnership Working

The Panel heard of several examples of successful joint working including ward walks and joint patrols by Street Wardens and Police Community Support Officers. Such an approach offered an effective way of responding to community concerns in a co-ordinated way.   The support provided by the Council at Altogether Place and the Marios Tinenti Centre also provided a focus and location for members of the community to forge links with each other.

However it was important that expectations were managed and that the responsibilities of different organisations was communicated, for example the

role of the County Council as highway authority for making traffic orders and the Borough Council for enforcing existing ones.

The co-ordination of volunteers and voluntary work was the responsibility of voluntary sector organisations, not the Council. The Council could influence the work of the voluntary sector through Service Level Agreements and conditions attached to grants. The work of the voluntary sector could be an important way of meeting community aspirations but concerns were raised that many people did not know how this could be achieved or what support was available, for example through Voluntary Action Leicestershire or Voluntary Action Charnwood. The Panel also acknowledged the value to Loughborough of voluntary work undertaken by university students.

Three years ago, the Council identified the strategic partners for community grants. What the Council would be able to achieve depended upon resources, therefore the focus had to be on quantifying added value. The issue was how to make the process easier and less bureaucratic, whilst avoiding misappropriation of funds and ensuring accountability.

Representatives of Parish and Town councils and community groups mentioned that the process for applying for grants from the Council was time-consuming. More support could also required by voluntary groups in completing applications for funding from other sources, e.g. lottery grants.

Charnwood Together and Leicestershire Together were the key partnerships where plans were shared and a common countywide plan was formed.

Not all partnerships were relevant to community empowerment, since partnership working was often about effective inter-agency working. However, some issues were community related and the strategic partnerships included representation from the voluntary sector. Partners were moving to more personalised service provision with a multi-agency approach, for example, problem families, which was personalised to the family rather than community focussed.

Parish and Town Councils

The Panel heard about the liaison between the Borough Council and Parish and Town Councils. For example, when the Street Management service was launched officers attended a number of Parish/Town Council meetings to discuss this with them.

Parish and Town Councils were close to their communities and this provided an opportunity for engagement and empowerment. The success of developing a Parish Plan for Woodhouse was given as an example. The Panel also heard that some activity in localities was happening without the relevant Parish or Town Council's knowledge.

Due to funding and capacity restrictions, it was not possible for the Council to offer assistance to all Parish/Town Councils. Therefore Parish/Town Councils should be proactive and request support when it was required. At Parish/Town level funding was often best utilised in areas that had strong locality systems that could assist in and enhance the work of the Borough Council. It was recognised that many areas suffered from a decline in community spirit.

The Panel heard from Charnwood Youth Council that Parish/Town Councils needed to be more proactive in addressing issues affecting young people as most appeared to take a reactive approach, only acting when approached by the Borough or County Council. Councillors in rural wards needed to take the initiative and approach youth workers.

The Council organised a Parish Clerks Liaison Meeting, where feedback could be given about how working arrangements could be improved. Parish/Town Councils were closer to the community but did not have the administrative resources to address matters.

Working with Parish and Town Councils fitted in with the Corporate Plan aspirations on partnership working and community transfer.

The Borough Council and Parish/Town Councils work together to empower local communities through community budgets and many Borough Councillors attend Parish/Town Council meetings to provide a communication and liaison link.

Further issues raised by Parish and Town Councils in respect of consultation are set out in the communication and consultation section above.

Role of the Council and Councillors

Councillors were an important voice for the communities they represented and the evidence provided to the Panel would be very useful to Councillors in their ward work. However it was not readily known or signposted for either Councillors or members of the public.

It was important that work around empowerment was not tokenistic and reference was made to neighbourhood/ward walks sometimes not being attended by Councillors.

The Council's view was that community initiatives were more successful if the idea and support grew from within the community. It was important that those engaged were representative of the community as a whole and not just vocal individuals or groups from the area. Councillors had an important role to play with identifying groups, signposting and supporting them.

Many residents associations had been started or were supported by Ward Councillors. The central role of a Ward Councillor was that of a community leader

and as such they provide the required leadership for empowering their communities.

Borough Councillors should be encouraged to participate in Parish/Town Councils and community and residents groups in order to build local community relations and training should be offered where needed.

The role of the Ward Councillor had changed over time and the skills of Councillors varied so it was important to invest time in Councillor Development.

Due to limited funding, the Council needed to ensure that community expectations were managed but yet where a community had the passion for an idea the Council, as an enabler, would assist with achieving those aspirations. Realistically the Council was more likely to react than to be proactive, due to resource constraints.

During discussions about the issues considered at various points by the Panel, for example in the difference in responsiveness of different departments, it was informed that the Customer Service Strategy was currently being reviewed.

7.   Future Direction/Summary of Recommendations

Following its meeting on 3rd December 2012 the Panel identified the following issues which should feature in its recommendations:

1. that provision of a "Route Map" in the form of a step by step guide be made available to provide assistance to communities with understanding the process involved and the agencies to approach when seeking to establish a new community scheme or initiative;

2. that "Case Studies" of community initiatives and projects which have been successful be prepared in order to be publicised and shared as good practice;

3. that Consultation response times be amended to ensure that community groups and parishes would have enough time to consider consultations and provide a meaningful response;

4. that a review of the process for issuing Press Releases be undertaken with a view to targeting these where appropriate, for example, the Birstall Post may be the appropriate organisation to receive press releases concerning initiatives specific to that area;

5. that having received information and responses from communities, the results and reasons for a decision must always be relayed;

6. that the Council and Councillors take steps to equip Councillors to undertake the community leadership role effectively; and

7. that the following be fed into the Customer Service Strategy, which was currently under review:

   • "It appeared that services within the Council were isolated from each other and that information was not being shared".

   • "The Council would benefit greatly if it developed a means of pooling information so that it was readily available to officers undertaking similar or related tasks in the future".

   • "Consultation and requests for feedback needed to specifically detail what information is required and the preferred format to receive it in".

8. Background Papers

   • Scope Document

   • Policy Scrutiny Group, 21st February 2012, agenda item 8 and minute no 45 available on the Council's website at:
     http://www.charnwood.gov.uk/committees/policy_scrutiny_group

   • Scrutiny Management Board, 28th March 2012, agenda item 5 and minute no 55 and 23rd May 2012 agenda item 5 and minute no 4.

   • Reports and notes of Panel meetings available on the Council's website at:
     http://www.charnwood.gov.uk/committees/empowering_communities_scrutiny_panel:

     12th July 2012
     23rd August 2012
     27th September 2012
     29th October 2012
     3rd December 2012
     24th January 2013

   • Background Documents available to Members on the Council's intranet at http://info.charnwood.local/sites/Policy_Scrutiny_Group/Lists/Empowering%20Communities%20Scrutiny%20Panel/AllItems.aspx and available to the public upon request.

Charnwood

SCRUTINY REVIEW: SCOPE

REVIEW TITLE: Empowering Communities

SCOPE OF ITEM / TERMS OF REFERENCE
1. Developing an enabling Council focused on how to meet community aspirations.   2. Reviewing the stages in the 'ladder of participation' reached by different Council functions (Informing, Consulting, Involving, Collaborating, Empowering) and where they could reach.   It is proposed that the Panel proceed on the basis of initially selecting a number of services or functions (e.g. provision of services for the young) as test cases in which to review the 'ladder of participation' and the relevant issues identified in the 'What will be Included' section below. This would result in the production of an interim report. The Panel would then continue its work by applying its interim findings to other services and functions so that any of the issues identified in the 'What will be Included' section which were not applicable to the initial group of services and functions could be addressed.

REASON FOR SCRUTINY
To review current activity and assist the Council in developing new approaches in the light of the passing of the Localism Act 2011 and the Government's wider localism agenda and of our own Corporate Plan.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE GROUP
Councillor Shepherd (Chair)   Councillors Gaskell, Pacey, Sharp, Smidowicz and Williams

WHAT WILL BE INCLUDED
1. The effectiveness of community engagement work across the Council and an exploration of options for expanding the role of local communities and partners in decision-making.   2. The effectiveness of the Council's work with the voluntary and community sector, parish and town councils and residents and community groups to build community capacity and deliver agreed objectives (this could include exploring options for service delivery in the future).   3. The role of the Council as 'an enabling Council' (including what 'an enabling Council' looks like) sharing service delivery processes with local communities and examining the options for joint design and delivery of those services with local communities and the community and voluntary sector.   4. What support is required from the statutory sector to enable community empowerment to succeed.

5. Empowering hard-to-reach communities.
6. The role of councillors in empowering communities.
7. Whether and how a localism or community empowerment strategy could be developed for the Council.

WHAT WILL BE EXCLUDED

1. Policy Scrutiny Group recommended to the Scrutiny Management Board that a further report in respect of community engagement work to support localism in the Local Development Framework be included on the Work Programme for consideration by the Group at its meeting to be held on 14th August 2012. It is proposed that this strand be omitted from the panel for the time being.
2. Activity relating to promoting the Big Society, such as encouraging volunteering.
3. Partnership working and the Local Strategic Partnership.

KEY TASKS * * including consideration of efficiency savings

The approach of the Panel to each of the issues identified under the 'What will be included' section will be to consider:

- What the Council currently does. The Council already does considerable work to support the principles of localism, for example:
  - support for the voluntary and community sector through community grants
  - consultation
  - neighbourhood management
  - support for Area and Neighbourhood Forums
- What are the Council's aspirations and priorities, particularly as set out in the new Corporate Plan
- What best practice exists within the Council (e.g. the work of the Communities and Partnerships team at Peel Drive and with neighbourhood walks), locally and nationally (e.g. the IDeA empowering authority framework)
- Identifying the aspirations and concerns of the public
- What barriers exist to empowering communities, e.g. in relation to requirements for governance and accountability arrangements, and how can they be overcome.

It will be important for the panel to develop a common understanding of the approaches and terminology involved, for example the difference between engagement and empowerment and its own definition of hard to reach communities. It may wish to develop this as a glossary.

STAKEHOLDERS, OUTSIDE AGENCIES, OTHER ORGANISATIONS *

- Input from the Community Development Foundation or similar organisation to provide initial advice and an overview for the Panel
- Voluntary Action Charnwood and Voluntary Action LeicesterShire on behalf of Voluntary Sector Forum
- Representatives of the Council's strategic partners funded through the Charnwood Grants scheme (eg Citizens' Advice Bureau and Human Rights and Equalities Charnwood)
- Representatives of Residents' Groups and Community Associations
- CNH Tenants' Representative Group
- Parish and Town Councils – potentially represented by LRALC
- Borough Councillors (through a survey to discover their views)

- Groups which represent particular groups or interests, eg:
  - o Youth Council
  - o Disability Forum
  - o Women's Environmental Network
  - o Charnwood Arts
  - o Charnwood Health Forum

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS
Is an impact needs assessment required? – to be considered at the Panel's penultimate meeting

LINKS/OVERLAPS TO OTHER REVIEWS
See reference to work on community engagement work to support localism in the Local Development Framework in the 'What will be excluded section' above. The Cabinet is due to receive a further report on future options for service delivery which may be subject to separate scrutiny.

RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS
Officer Support Committee Services: Mike Hooper Governance and Scrutiny Research Officer: Michael Hopkins (as required) Neighbourhood Services: advice (as required) Initial external advice from Community Development Foundation or similar

REPORT REQUIREMENTS (Officer information)	
REVIEW COMMENCEMENT DATE	**COMPLETION DATE FOR DRAFT REPORT**
12th July 2012	TBC

* Key tasks and stakeholders may be subject to change as the review progresses.

PROGRESS OF PANEL WORK

MEETING DATE	PROGRESS TO DATE
12th July 2012	Terms of Reference agreed. First two functions to scrutinise agreed. Potential further witnesses considered.
23rd August 2012	Considered evidence from: Sarah Coupe, Children and Young Peoples Strategic Co-ordinator. Alan Twells, Head of Regulatory Services and Karl Harrison, Street Scene Manager (North).
27th September 2012	Considered evidence from: Verity Graham, Neighbourhood and Partnership Co-ordinator and Julie Robinson, Head of Neighbourhood Services. Further witnesses agreed for meetings in October and November.

29th October 2012	Considered evidence from:
	• Marios Tinenti Centre (Peel Drive, Loughborough); • Altogether Place (Warwick Way, Loughborough); • Charnwood Youth Council; • Woodhouse Parish Council and Shepshed Town Council.
3rd December 2012	A summary of the issues identified from the evidence gathered so far was submitted to the Panel and to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive. From those issues 11 questions were identified for the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive and responses were provided to the Panel. From the evidence and the responses to the questions, the Panel identified key issues to be addressed.
January 2013 (day to be determined)	To consider the evidence gathered so far and the responses of the witnesses, the key issues identified to be addressed and to develop an interim report for consideration by Scrutiny Management Board.

DATE REPORT SUBMITTED TO SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Updated 18/12/12.

Empowering Communities Scrutiny Panel
Options for way forward

Introduction

The purpose of this note is to assist the Panel in considering how it wishes to progress its work following the completion of the initial tasks it identified.

The main question for the Panel to consider is how far it wishes to go in identifying good practice which could enable the Council to move up the ladder of participation (see below) and achieve the aspirations set out in the Council's Corporate Plan. To assist the Panel in considering this question a number of good practice examples are appended to this paper.

The ladder of participation

- Local decision-making
- Joint action
- Continual engagement
- Surveys and door-knocking
- Newsletters and blogs

Empowering
Collaborating
Involving
Consulting
Informing

Current position

In its meetings to date the Panel has heard evidence from a sample of Council services, representatives of community groups and parish and town councils and from the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council.

The scope document for the Panel's work envisaged that it would operate on the basis of initially selecting a number of services or functions as test cases. It would use these test cases to review the ladder of participation and other issues within the Panel's terms of reference. This initial work would result in the production of an interim report. The Panel would then continue its work by applying its interim findings to other services and functions so that any of the issues identified in the scope document that were not applicable to the initial group of services and functions could be addressed.

Review of work to date and options for future work

Following its meeting on 3rd December 2012 the Panel identified the following issues which should feature in its recommendations:

1. that provision of a "Route Map" in the form of a step by step guide be made available to provide assistance to communities with understanding the process involved and the agencies to approach when seeking to establish a new community scheme or initiative;
2. that "Case Studies" of community initiatives and projects which have been successful be prepared in order to be publicised and shared as good practice;
3. that Consultation response times be amended to ensure that community groups and parishes would have enough time to consider consultations and provide a meaningful response;
4. that a review of the process for issuing Press Releases be undertaken with a view to targeting these where appropriate, for example, the Birstall Post may be the appropriate organisation to receive press releases concerning initiatives specific to that area;
5. that having received information and responses from communities, the results and reasons for a decision must always be relayed;
6. that the Council and Councillors take steps to equip Councillors to undertake the community leadership role effectively; and
7. that the following be fed into the Customer Service Strategy, which was currently under review:
   - "It appeared that services within the Council were isolated from each other and that information was not being shared".
   - "The Council would benefit greatly if it developed a means of pooling information so that it was readily available to officers undertaking similar or related tasks in the future".

- "Consultation and requests for feedback needed to specifically detail what information is required and the preferred format to receive it in".

The following table sets out the issues identified in the scope document as items to be included or key tasks and assesses the extent to which they have been addressed in the Panel's work to date and the issues identified above.

Issue	How addressed	Options for future work
The effectiveness of community engagement work across the Council and an exploration of options for expanding the role of local communities and partners in decision-making	Reviewed in accordance with approach described above for: - Children and Young People - Street Management - Communities and Partnerships See recommendations 1 and 2 in particular but all are relevant in varying degrees	The original approach envisaged that further services would be reviewed to ensure that all issues identified in the scope document were addressed Consider further ideas for spreading best practice such as the use of wikis (websites which allow multiple users to edit content)
The effectiveness of the Council's work with the voluntary and community sector, parish and town councils and residents and community groups to build community capacity and deliver agreed objectives (this could include exploring options for service delivery in the future)	Evidence taken from: - Altogether Place - Marios Tinenti Centre - Charnwood Youth Council - Shepshed Town Council - Woodhouse Parish Council Concerns expressed by witnesses addressed in recommendations 3, 4, 5 and 7 relating to consolidating work in early stages of ladder of participation	Look at best practice examples leading to recommendations about how to consolidate and advance the position on the ladder of participation

Issue	How addressed	Options for future work
The role of the Council as 'an enabling Council' (including what 'an enabling Council' looks like) sharing service delivery processes with local communities and examining the options for joint design and delivery of those services with local communities and the community and voluntary sector	Questions relating to Corporate Plan objectives have been asked of Council witnesses See Recommendations 1 and 2 The Panel heard evidence that the Council targeted resources towards areas that displayed the most need but also offered a signposting service to assist groups from areas with less need.	Look at best practice examples leading to recommendations about how to advance the position on the ladder of participation and meet the aspirations set out in the Corporate Plan Consider whether the balance between targeting and signposting is appropriate Make use of the IDeA Ideal Empowering Authority Framework as a questionnaire/ toolkit to guide future work
What support is required from the statutory sector to enable community empowerment to succeed	This was referred to in various stages of the Panel's work but not considered directly To some extent all recommendations are relevant to this issue	Any further work in relation to this issue would be about the support required to advance any additional recommendations the Panel identifies
Empowering hard-to-reach communities	This was referred to in various stages of the Panel's work but not considered directly other than in hearing about empowering young people	Identify this as an area on which to focus further evidence gathering

Issue	How addressed	Options for future work
The role of councillors in empowering communities	This was referred to in various stages of the Panel's work but not considered directly See recommendation 6	Identify this as an area on which to focus further evidence gathering
Whether and how a localism or community empowerment strategy could be developed for the Council	Did not seem to come up as an idea proposed by witnesses although the issues of producing guidance, route maps and generally better communication and co-ordination did See recommendations 1, 2 and 7	Identify whether similar approaches have been adopted by other councils and whether these have been effective Make use of the IDeA Ideal Empowering Authority Framework as a questionnaire/ toolkit to guide future work
What are the Council's aspirations and priorities, particularly as set out in the new Corporate Plan	These were identified and questions relating to them asked of Council witnesses	No further action required to identify the aspirations and priorities but further work could be undertaken to produce recommendations as to how they could be delivered based on identified good practice
What best practice exists within the Council, locally and nationally	Many examples of good practice in the work of the Council were identified See Recommendations 1 and 2	Look at best practice examples outside the Council leading to recommendations about how to advance the position on the ladder of participation and meet the aspirations set out in the Corporate Plan

Issue	How addressed	Options for future work
Identifying the aspirations and concerns of the public	Evidence from external witnesses identified some issues of concern See Recommendations 3, 4, 5 and 7	Identify this as an area on which to focus further evidence gathering
What barriers exist to empowering communities, e.g. in relation to requirements for governance and accountability arrangements, and how can they be overcome	This was referred to in various stages of the Panel's work but not considered directly	Any further work would in relation to this issue would be about the support required to advance any additional recommendations the Panel identifies

Appendices – Good Practice Examples

1. Tower Hamlets Participatory Budgeting Events
2. Community Led Planning in Cradley
3. Nottingham City Council
   (Taken from *Engaging with communities – lessons from the frontline* (CDF))
4. Mainstreaming Empowerment Across Brighton and Hove
5. A Partnership Approach to Community Engagement in Cumbria
6. Newcastle – Leading from the Front on Community Engagement
   (Taken from *The ideal empowering authority: an illustrated framework* (IDeA))

Case study 3

Tower Hamlets Participatory Budgeting Events

Full details at:
www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/you-decide-
tower-hamlets-london

In spring 2009, Tower Hamlets Partnership decided to use £2.4 million of area based grant to allocate using participatory budgeting. The money, which is mainstream funding, was to be allocated to mainstream services, essentially a 'top up' of the basic services provided in each of eight local areas, called local area partnerships.

The Partnership asked all partners to provide projects or services to go into a menu of options for residents to vote on. The projects had to help achieve either previously determined local priorities or local area agreement targets.

The voting process was split out into the eight local area partnerships. More than 800 people were involved. Participants at the various PB events heard a short presentation about each of the services on offer, there was then time for questions and facilitated discussion on tables before taking a final, electronic, vote.

Sixty two per cent of participants felt that the process had strengthened their level of influence over local decisions; 68% felt that the event was a good way of deciding how money should be spent locally; 61% felt that the process had improved their satisfaction with their local area and 77% of participants would like to see the process repeated.

Case study 4

Community led planning in Cradley

Full details at:
http://www.cdf.org.uk//c/document_library/get_file?uuid=7c6c9
9c8-1652-4964-af18-81b08c46522d&groupId=10128

Cradley Parish Council held a public meeting to start the parish planning process. People were asked to join various working groups, which were coordinated by facilitators who provided the groups with a clear brief.

Cradley also used the Planning for Real[2] process in three village locations to ensure maximum engagement with different parts of the parish, for example farmers.

A survey was also sent to every household in the parish, which had a 59% response rate.

This variety of approaches meant different sections of the village that had traditionally been seen as separate (for example the social housing estate) were now seen as part of the same community.

There is a sense that the parish plan brought together a village which had previously been divided between those who lived in the social housing estate and owner occupiers. Since its completion people from the social housing estate are now represented both on the parish council and the village hall management committee.

The parish council and Herefordshire Council adopted the completed Cradley Parish Plan. As well as having an impact on

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2. A process in which participants make a 3D model of their local area and add suggestions of the way they would like to see their community develop. They then prioritise these in groups and create an action plan for decision-makers to take away http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/Planning+for+Real

planning decisions in Cradley, the parish plan also acted as a catalyst for a range of other activity, including the following. People in the village are providing services which were previously unavailable but which the parish plan demonstrated a need for, for example a youth group.

- Funds have been raised, partly through the Football Association, for a new playing field, which will provide a much-needed facility for young people.
- New road signs have been put up and members of the community have been trained in using speed cameras.
- A Grade II listed building was refurbished to become the village hall, which includes a community resource centre.
- A 'safe routes to school' project was developed.

Case study 5

Nottingham City Council

Full details at:
www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=13401327&aspect=full

Nottingham City Council has developed a programme of opportunities to increase local people's involvement at a neighbourhood level. These include local issue group meetings, park life community celebration events, development of the community newsletter Community Arrow, circulated to every household in the city and activities to support ward councillors. The aim of these plans is to increase the numbers of residents satisfied with the area and their perception of their ability to influence decisions (as measured by National Indicators 1[3], 4[4] and 5[5]).

In 2008/09 and 2009/10, each local councillor was allocated £10,000 to support their role as 'Champion of place'. Further funds were allocated, based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation and the ward population. This budget allows councillors to allocate funds that support ward initiatives and projects put forward by the community such as family fun days, community BBQs, play equipment and park benches. Feedback both from councillors and residents has been extremely positive.

To support councillors' role as 'Champions of place' further, ward walks have been successfully taking place in all nine areas of the city. As well as aiming to raise improve the appearance of public spaces, these walks are a way to reach out to communities and

3. The percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area

4. The percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality

5. Overall / general satisfaction with local area, for more detail on National Indicators see http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/735112.pdf

bring key officers together. Neighbourhoods are leafleted before the walks and residents are encouraged to put the flier in their window if they would like the Councillors to call as they pass. Ward walks provide an opportunity to join up the services of Nottingham City Council, Nottingham City Homes (NCH) and the police. This partnership working has the potential to improve value for money, not least in streamlining the number of meetings. For example NCH's estate inspections have, where possible, been merged with ward walks.

Empowering communities takes both time and resources, but feedback from residents and the recent place survey[6] results confirm that the council is heading in the right direction.

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6. A survey of citizens' views and perspectives administered by each local authority, see http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgov/audit/ nis/Pages/ placesurvey.aspx

Case study: reading between the lines – mainstreaming empowerment across Brighton and Hove

Residents' involvement in the design of a small, branch library on the outskirts of Brighton has been an inspiration for the LSP. This case study shows how the council, along with other partners across the city, has developed a city-wide approach to engagement activities.

This example highlights best practice against the 'mainstreaming empowerment' pillar of the IDeA's 'framework for an ideal empowering authority.'

When Brighton and Hove City Council announced plans to build a new branch library to replace the Coldean library, the new library should have been welcomed by the local community. The existing library was housed in a cramped, single story building with an asbestos roof. However, instead of celebrating the news, many of the residents were unhappy about the plans.

Jenny Moore, who at the time worked for the Trust for Developing Communities, said: "This small community had already experienced a lot of disruption due to major building work in the area for the previous year. Also, there was real concern that the single storey library was to be replaced by a much taller building to house more flats. The community had had enough."

The council received many objections to the proposed library, which was to be funded by Hanover Housing as part of an agreement to build affordable flats. Sue Harris was one of the objectors. "While the old library had its problems, we liked the look of it – it looked a bit like a small Swiss chalet. It was hard to tell from the initial design what the new building would be like but it certainly looked very large compared to the old one. Also, I live right opposite the library and the new building looked right over my house and gardens, and I felt I would lose a lot of privacy," she said.

Consultation steering group

As a community development worker for the area, Jenny teamed up with the council's library service to find a way of working with local people about the proposal. "We decided to form a consultation steering group, particularly ensuring people opposed to the new library development were involved. They would get to see all the plans and be able to express any concerns they might have, as well as have the opportunity to talk directly to library staff and the housing association. All their fears could be channelled through the steering group," said Jenny.

Sue had always been active in the community and saw the steering group as an opportunity to influence the plans for the library. "It helped us understand the plans in detail and also gave us an opportunity to put our ideas forward. The council and Hanover Housing really bent over backwards to take on board our thoughts; we didn't feel that the plans were just forced on us. As the steering group developed it really wasn't a case of them and us – it was all of us working together to get the most for the community," she said.

She said what was also important was the degree of honesty from the council and housing association, adding: "They always explained what was possible and what wasn't, so we felt we were always kept in the loop and knew where we stood. What's more, senior staff also came and met us – they took it all very seriously."

Jenny Moore said it was important that she not only helped work with the residents on the steering group but also ensured the wider community had a say in the development of the library. "While the steering group represented a lot of people in the community, there were still others in outlying areas that needed a voice. So a volunteer and I knocked on over 300 doors to carry out a survey as well, as speaking to people at a number of other events including a community festival."

Community ideas

As a result of all this activity, the council had a wealth of suggestions of what people would like to see in a new library. They included tea and coffee facilities, an area where people could relax and read the newspapers and a special area for children where they could display artwork. Sue said the result of all the community engagement was a library that is now truly loved by the local residents – even though the building still overlooks her home. "I would never have believed I would be saying this but the library is really beautiful – we all love it. So many people use it now compared with before. Parents pop in after they drop their children off at school or older people can sit and read a newspaper in a comfy chair. There is also a computer suite which we have used to produce a community website, as well as having our regular residents' meetings here. It has helped give the community a focus and I don't think it would have been as good without the steering group and residents' involvement. I have nothing but praise for the way this whole process was handled," she said.

The story of Coldean library features in Brighton and Hove's Community Engagement Framework produced by the Brighton and Hove Strategic Partnership. "The framework is a policy document that sets out the LSP's commitment to and understanding of community engagement in Brighton and Hove. However, it is also a practical tool as it helps define community engagement as well as sets up standards that partners should adhere to. Additionally, it sets out a series of priority actions that must be taken to improve community engagement in the city," said Angie Greany, who works for the communities and equality team at Brighton and Hove Council.

Lack of coordination

The framework was developed after the council undertook a piece of research into community engagement in the city and found out that although there was lots of activity, much of it was ad hoc. There were plenty of examples of both good and bad practice, but just as importantly, organisations weren't learning from these experiences. There was also confusion over language and what organisations meant by a range of community engagement terms. However, the biggest issue was the lack of coordination.

Roger French, who chairs the LSP, said: "The reality was that residents were being bombarded with a variety of engagement activities by all the local agencies including the health service, the police and the local authority. In addition, there were also a range of partnership organisations that were carrying out research with local people. But despite the fact that much of the public sector wanted to know similar information, there was no coordination of efforts.

"We felt it was important for the public that we coordinated community engagement activities. At the same time this would mean a much more efficient use of resources. If an engagement event is to be held within a community, it makes sense to ensure that all the agencies are aware of it happening and they share information. For example, I run Brighton and Hove buses and if such an event is going on in one of the communities, it could be a helpful way to also find out what they think of their bus service."

One of the actions coming out of the framework is a website consultation portal. This will enable all the LSP members to share information about consultation activities as well as see results. The portal enables users to search by topic, geography or organisation, to see what consultations have taken place. In addition, the LSP has developed an e-learning package on community engagement that has been popular with organisations across the city.

"The consultation portal, and other learning and development activities, has helped raise awareness of the framework," said Angie. "The support has been vital to ensure that the framework is understood and viewed as positive and helpful rather than just a new set of rules that people are frustrated by."

Key lessons

Angie says she has learnt four key lessons from the process:

1. It is critical to engage all members of the LSP in the development of the framework. A working group was established with representation from all LSP members who could advise on how best to consult with their organisation, partnership or sector. This process is fairly intensive and it is important to leave enough time to get it right. The working group was supported by a small project team headed up by the council that also included the third sector, to drive the development of the framework.

2. The 'Duty to Involve' is highly significant in getting senior council staff signed up to the process. Before this was introduced, not all would have seen community engagement as relevant to them. The difficult financial outlook for the public sector has also helped focus the mind of senior managers to help ensure data, intelligence, relationships and opportunities for dialogue are maximised.

3. While the engagement process with the community and voluntary sector was very positive, it was not so smooth within the council. There was high level support from the cabinet member for communities affairs, inclusion and internal relations, and from some senior managers. However there was an assumption that if senior managers supported the framework, this would be carried throughout the directorates. This was not always the case as the channels for dissemination were not as effective as assumed. In hindsight, more engagement work should have been carried out within the council as it was with other partners.

4. The involvement of the council's scrutiny committee will be key to developing the framework. It has the role of monitoring how the framework is used and will receive twice yearly updates to feed into the LSP. This will include calling to account any organisations that are not consistently working to the framework standards.

For more information, contact Angie Greany at angie.greany@brighton-hove.gov.uk or on 01273 295053.

Case study: Riding high – a partnership approach to community engagement in Cumbria

'Together We Can' is a programme of community engagement work across Cumbria. One project in Harraby shows the positive impact the programme has had on the police, district and county council's work in communities. Its success prompted a visit by prime minister Gordon Brown in 2009.

This work in Cumbria provides an excellent example of working with diverse communities and neighbourhoods – a pillar of the IDeA's 'framework for an ideal empowering authority'.

An area of wasteland on the outskirts of Carlisle has been pivotal in changing attitudes towards young people. The police regularly received complaints about problem teenagers from residents living on a housing estate in Harraby until a BMX track was built on the site. "We used to get lots of calls from people about some of the kids in the area causing a nuisance," said Inspector Barry Bell. "But that has massively been reduced since the track was opened. The children maintain and look after it – there is a real sense of ownership and pride in it."

Harraby is an area of mainly social housing that was built over 40 years ago. Teenagers wanting something new in their community put forward the idea of the track to local councillors as part of the community engagement initiative 'Together We Can.' This is a partnership involving the county and city councils and a range of agencies, including the police, the primary care trust and the Riverside Housing Association. At its heart is the active involvement of local people which Inspector Bell believes is the reason for its success.

Inspector Bell said: "I am a Harraby lad – I grew up here. The area has always had its share of problems but I can't emphasise enough how little Harraby is a problem now.

Just in the last year anti-social behaviour is down by a third.

"There is a real sense of pride in the community. It's amazing the changes that have taken place over the last couple of years and it's all down to community empowerment. I want to use what we have learnt from here and apply it to the other areas I police in the city."

Collaboration at local level

Cyril Webber is the local ward councillor for both the city and the county council and has been involved in the project from its inception in 2008. He said: "The project is based around a real collaboration. The BMX track is just one example. The county council provided the land, the city council found the money and the residents cleared the site."

One reason for the success of the project is the appointment of a community involvement worker who is jointly funded by the police and the county council with in-kind support from the city council. The involvement officer is based in the community centre a couple of days a week in order to liaise with residents about service issues, ranging from grass cutting to social activities.

The 'Together We Can' project is driven by a monthly stakeholders group which is run by the residents in collaboration with the partner organisations. "This is a seamless project," said Councillor Webber. "You don't get arguments about who takes the lead on particular projects - everyone pulls together as one team working in harmony."

Inspector Bell agrees: "We talk about working in partnership but often what we all mean is that we have a problem and we each have a little bit of it. Here it

feels very different. We come together with a common purpose of improving Harraby. We are not just chipping in our bit but have a shared set of values and vision which is based on doing the very best we can for the community."

The project not only crosses professional boundaries but also geographic ones, as it covers two city council wards. Steve Dunn, a community engagement officer for the city council who works in the area, said: "We knew from the outset that Harraby was a natural community but that it also covers a number of different electoral boundaries. Instead of wards, we based the project on how the community defined its own area; for example, what shops or parks people use, rather than the streets they live in. It hasn't always been easy working like this but it has definitely been worth it as the project area makes sense for the community."

The relationship between the city and the county council has also been positive. Both organisations saw the initiative as a means to try out a new way of working with communities and delivering services.

"The project is an opportunity to work with partners to develop a model for engaging and empowering people," said Rob Burns, community support manager for the city council. "On the community engagement's ladder of participation, we have been good at the first few steps - informing, consulting and involving people. For example, we have set up with the county council a joint neighbourhood forum. However, we are not so experienced at the top end of the ladder in releasing power to communities. Part of this work is to explore how we genuinely empower communities and we have cross-party support for this."

Burns believes that Harraby is now also well on the way to delivering on the other steps of the participation ladder. "Over the last couple of years, we have trained dozens of people around the issues of decision-making, budget processes and how public bodies work. These people are now actively involved in shaping services locally and ensuring they meet the needs of local residents, whether its discussing what should happen to the local secondary school that is due to close, or deciding on the contractors to design and build new play facilities. The challenge for us is to maintain this activity and interest once the pilot phase is over."

County wide initiative
The Harraby project is part of a much wider programme of community engagement which has been developed by Cumbria County Council, a member of the NEA.

"We initially undertook six pilots in 2008/9, of which Harraby was one," said Stuart Pate, head of community at Cumbria County Council. "This was to experiment with a range of approaches to community engagement within different environments – from rural areas to city estates. The purpose of the pilots was to assess the feasibility of a rolling programme of partnership-based intensified outreach, building on the work of existing local staff teams and focused around listening and responding to community concerns. All activity was consistently branded under the banner 'Together We Can'."

He added: "The main aims were to test whether the approach could address community issues more effectively, promote local ways of joining up service delivery and ensure the council was seen to respond and be influenced by the public."

The pilots were led by staff from the area support teams of the county council's community unit and were sponsored by the LAA's 'safer and stronger' thematic partnership. The process started in June 2008 by ensuring buy-in from key stakeholders, such as the Cumbria Constabulary, NHS Cumbria and district councils. These stakeholders formed the basis of a strategic group that oversaw the programme.

Detailed operational planning took place between August and September 2008. This involved establishing local implementation groups in each area to plan and deliver a range of activities. The membership of the groups included a core of Cumbria and district-wide organisations represented by their locally based staff, as well as organisations with a specific local focus, including parish councils and community groups.

Stuart added: "These voluntary and community-based organisations were a significant asset both in terms of the planning and the delivery of the 'Together We Can' activity. They were able to provide in-depth knowledge of the local issues, which supplemented the data held by the agencies involved, as well as provide advice and direction on the best way to involve and engage the local communities."

There was a rolling programme of outreach activity between the pilots that took place between October and December 2008. The exception was Harraby, which had been selected as the one pilot to explore local partnership engagement activities over a longer period. While there were a number of core activities based around the six priority areas of the community strategy, local areas could 'pick and mix' additional ones.

For example, the Streetsafe initiative was a consistent theme within each of the localities including, for example, safety checks and surveys. These activities have contributed to promoting 'safe, strong and inclusive communities', one of the LSP's priority themes. Different approaches were adopted to encourage communities to engage with their local members in the six pilot areas. Such approaches included ward walks where local councillors walked around the areas they represent at an advertised time, with community police officers, fire and rescue and council staff.

In a number of the pilots, money problems were high on the list of community concerns. In response, many pilots put together a number of different events to help address this. For example, a 'Money Matters' day was held in Maryport and involved a wide range of partners coming together to assist people on issues such as low cost loans, council tax rebates, avoiding loan sharks, work benefits and energy saving.

Cost and results
Stuart said the 'Together We Can' programme was planned from the outset to be sustainable. "It was built around existing local staff and existing joint working in a community with short term intervention of county or district-wide staff. The total cost was small: around £20,000 for the whole county. For us to embed this approach across our organisation and others, costs had to be kept low. Many community projects are funded by 'funny money' with extra posts that are often here today and gone tomorrow. Our approach has been more about getting existing staff to think about different ways of engaging with the community and embedding this approach in the day job."

Cumbria County Council has looked at the impact that the pilot projects have had on National Indicator 4 (NI4) – the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their local area. As Stuart Pate explains, "We carried out survey work to look at changes to NI4 following the pilots. While these varied across the county, overall, the pilot projects showed community-level work had a very positive impact. On average, people's perceptions of being able to influence improved by a fifth following the pilots – from 28 per cent to 35 per cent."

Key lessons

Cumbria is currently undertaking phase two of this intensive engagement work which, with the exception of Harraby, involves short-term working across the county with at least two 'Together We Can' activities in each district. "One of the key learning points from phase one was that local staff wanted more flexibility in how they approached the pilots. For example, in the first phase, we had the activities taking place over a couple of months. Now, there is a 12-month timeframe and the pilots can decide when they want to undertake the activities as well as tying it even more closely into existing initiatives. However, all the activities will still come under the 'Together We Can' branding," said Stuart.

Stuart said key lessons from the 'Together We Can' pilots include:

The outreach approach to delivering services can present challenges to some professions. There is a real difference in languages and styles, with some groups of people much less comfortable working in a community setting compared with others.

However, we are finding parts of our organisation, and others, are already working more effectively in communities as a result of the pilots, although significant cultural change will take time.

Within a complex partnership not everyone has experience of working with councillors – even within a council. Councillors are absolutely critical to working creatively at a local level and have extensive networks which are often invaluable. It is important to understand what they have to offer and how best to work with them.

The outreach approach to local delivery can sometimes be seen as yet more work added to the day job. This was one of the criticisms from staff involved in the first pilot. Yet local partnership activity often helps reduce the day job because it is about preventing problems arising, as shown by the reduction in anti-social behaviour in Harraby. In phase two, the pilots are over a much longer timeframe so local staff can more easily fit them around their existing commitments.

For further information, contact Lorrainne Smyth on 01539 713435 or lorrainne.smyth@cumbriacc.gov.uk or go to: www.togetherwecan.org.uk

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Further tools and resources for working with diverse communities and neighbourhoods

Our website www.idea.gov.uk/empowerment provides the following resources to help you work with your communities and neighbourhoods:
- case studies showing how councils and LSPs are working with their communities in a range of settings, including rural areas. Many of these show examples of targeted work with marginalised communities
- a tool to help you to map the community empowerment work of your LSP
- a tool to help you map how empowered a neighbourhood is
- a tool to help you produce a local empowerment plan
- a tool and resources to help you integrate your community empowerment work with your community cohesion and equalities work
- information on a large range of tools and methods to use when working with communities.

Case study: Newcastle – leading from the front on community engagement

Newcastle City Council has developed a range of innovative ways to involve their public at ward level, including a participation unit that engages young people, revamped ward committees, neighbourhood charters and a performance management system that monitors delivery at ward level.

While Newcastle highlights best practice that is relevant to each pillar of the 'Framework for an ideal empowering authority', this case study is particularly applicable to the third pillar – the role of councillors in championing community engagement.

Newcastle City Council has carried out democratic and community engagement activity at ward level since the 1970s, but in the last few years this has undergone a transformation. Bryan Beverley, who works for the council and has responsibility for ward committees in Newcastle, said: "Ward committees had become a bit too comfortable and were withering on the vine. A number of members felt that they had turned into grumble sessions rather than agents of change. With this in mind, we carried out research among members as well as residents who both did and didn't attend committee meetings. They confirmed that while the ward was the right level to address local issues, the committee system needed to be revitalised."

New powers and budgets
The new administration removed area committees in 2004 and gave wards increased powers, budgets and delegated functions. It also changed how it delivered local services, with the aim of making them more responsive to local need.

For example, Newcastle environmental services had historically adopted a 'one size fits all' approach and been locked into a working culture that was depot-based and reluctant to change. To move on from this and provide a more proactive environmental service, a rapid response team was introduced. Staff were deployed to each ward and equipped with tools, a van or even a three-wheel pedal bike, under the direction of a neighbourhood response manager.

"This immediately made a big difference to how the wards were run," said Bryan. "For example, if a resident came to the ward committee with a concern about street litter, the committee had the authority and the people to address this issue. The result was often a quicker resolution to people's problems. Ward committees are also seen as belonging to local people and as a means for holding the council to account, rather than being run by the council to justify the council's actions."

Bottom-up approach
Although providing ward committees with an influence over local services made a difference to levels of engagement, the administration still wanted many more people involved in the democratic process. Rather than taking a top-down approach and dictating to wards what they should do about this, they set them the challenge to come up with their own ideas of how to involve a larger and more diverse number of people.

"A number of them started having walking ward committees during the summer months. These were based on a geographical itinerary rather than an agenda. Residents liked it because it is often easier to point out a problem in your neighbourhood than to try to explain it at a committee meeting. You also get a passing trade of people who would never come to meeting but are happy to chat in their own backyards," said Bryan.

Wards have also held debates around particular topics such as the environment, young people, crime and community safety. "These would be very informal occasions and we were finding we were getting 70 to 80 people at some of these events, compared to 20 or 30 at a normal ward committee," he adds.

Carousel events
He said one of the most successful approaches is the use of 'carousel' events that are held before formal committee meetings. These give the public an opportunity to talk directly to a range of different agencies in an informal setting. "We find that carousel meetings are popular with the public and a very effective way of getting things done quickly across a number of agencies," said Bryan. "It also means that we can undertake multiple conversations between residents and a range of service providers in a short space of time. Whereas in a formal ward committee local people may have to sit through a whole meeting, in a carousel setting they could get the same result in just 10 minutes. This way of working allows us not only to involve more residents and partners but it is also a much more efficient process."

Ward coordinators
Ward coordinators play a central role in the new system by supporting elected members in their community leadership roles. They also use an innovative performance management system to monitor whether an efficient service is being delivered to local people. Any concerns raised by residents are recorded on a computer-based, ward committee performance management system that tracks the action taken. Caroline Collinson, who works as a ward coordinator, said: "For example, if we come across someone complaining about fly-tipping, we enter this onto our system and it automatically comes up with the name of the officers responsible and sends them an email

highlighting the problem. It also creates a report with a timescale for a resolution which feeds into the next ward committee. The report is also available for the public so they can track what has happened to the issue they have raised."

Caroline added: "In the past, officers from the council or other agencies would have to wade through loads of minutes to see if there was an action for them. Now they are issued with a report and can see clearly what needs to be done, and by what deadline. It is not only an effective way of tracking issues for local residents, but also saves a lot of time for officers."

Engaging young people
Councillors in Newcastle have spent a lot of time finding out what young people think as part of their commitment to community engagement. They have developed a strategy for young people's involvement as well as setting up a participation unit dedicated to involving them in the democratic process.

"We have recruited a number of participation workers who spend around five to 10 hours per month in each ward," said Caroline. "This is not about play or youth work but specifically around engaging young people in activities around the democratic process. We want to develop a dialogue with them and find out their views about where they live, local services and their ideas for change."

As part of local democracy week, the council invited a group of young people to run a ward committee meeting. "The children were phenomenal – some were as young as 12 years old. They discussed local issues as well as listening to a number of updates, including one from the police on local crime and from a neighbourhood response manager. They understood the

processes and conducted themselves really well," said Peter Wood, who works for Newcastle City Council's play service.

Community leadership
Councillor David Faulkner, deputy leader of Newcastle City Council, has been pushing forward the new changes. He said: "The most important role of a councillor is to understand and represent the community, and through our ward structures people have an opportunity to say what they think and shape how particular local services are provided.

"We had an example where a community centre had some financial difficulties. We held a public meeting to discuss the issue and one idea that came up was to move the small local branch library into the centre. We did this and the library tripled the number of people using their service and the community centre found they had a lot more volunteers. In addition, the library paid rent to the centre for using the building."

Prior to the changes, ward committees would attract around 1,300 people. Today, that number has more than doubled, but just as important is the rise in the number of people who have been involved with the ward outside the traditional committee structure. In just one year, the council estimated that it had engaged with over 15,000 people at ward level.

Councillor Faulkner said he was pleased with the results, but is far from complacent. He added: "At 33 per cent, we have one of the highest rates among similar metropolitan areas for NI4. But we are still not satisfied with this and want to continue to drive this figure up. This is one reason why we have developed neighbourhood charters to reflect local priorities."

Neighbourhood charters
Newcastle Council has an ambitious programme to implement neighbourhood charters across the city by the summer of 2010. The council believes this tight timetable is possible because of its existing ward structures and active community engagement processes. "The charter will consist of a number of key issues that cross ward boundaries, but also ones that are specific to particular neighbourhoods which are typically made up of between 800 and 2,500 people," said Councillor Faulkner. "For example, one of my neighbourhoods has suffered from flooding and this will be covered in their charter."

Initially, a draft charter is drawn up at a ward level based on a range of information from public meetings to street surveys. This is sent to every household in the area with an invitation to come to a series of public meetings to discuss the draft charter. One of the neighbourhoods that developed a pilot charter opted for electronic voting to prioritise a range of issues that had been raised by the community. Following many discussions, a charter of very local commitments is published for each neighbourhood. However, Councillor Faulkner believes this is very much seen as the start of a process rather than the end.

He added: "The charters are very much living documents and there is a high premium on delivering on them. The public have invested so much time into developing the charters that it is absolutely critical we give them the respect they deserve and ensure we do deliver as promised."

Key lessons

Councillor Faulkner believes there are four key lessons that the council has learnt from their ward transformations:

Not all councillors have the skills to work at the local level as community leaders. For example, councillors need to be comfortable working in a facilitation role rather than just relying on traditional chairing skills. Newcastle has addressed this issue by setting up a series of learning and development opportunities, such as understanding neighbourhood and community leadership, with the IDeA.

Not all officers in mainstream functions are happy with the new approach at ward level. It is important to work hard to persuade them to support this approach by demonstrating the many benefits to service delivery that are gained through actively involving the public.

The financial climate is increasingly difficult for local government but it costs a lot of money to develop ward committees and neighbourhood charters – from employing community development staff to ward coordinators. There is a need to show that such an approach can also save money. For example, a carousel event is a highly efficient way of addressing local issues and can save officer time.

Although communications can be seen as a potential target for cost-saving in a difficult economic climate, it is often crucial to reinvigorating local democracy and establishing trust. Local people need to know what councils are doing, the outcomes and the benefits.

For further information, contact Bryan Beverley, Newcastle City Council, on 01912773593 or bryan.beverley@newcastle.gov.uk
www.newcastle.gov.uk

Further tools and resources on the role of councillors in community empowerment

Tools available at www.idea.gov.uk/empowerment to support councillors in their work with communities include:
- case studies showing the different ways that councillors are involving communities and acting as community leaders
- a community empowerment guide for councillors
- a pamphlet for councillors on 'What is community empowerment and where is it going.'
- In addition, here at the IDeA , we have produced Local Leadership Academy (LOLA) workbooks for councillors on community and neighbourhood engagement, social media and community leadership, an online guide to social media for councillors and videos of councillors talking about empowerment on the 'Better Engagement and Empowerment' Community of Practice.