

AREA COMMITTEE BOARD

6th December 2007 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Simmons (Chair); Councillors Ashraf, R. J. Davis and Mead.

5 MINUTES (REF: 2.1)

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meetings of the Board held on 6th June 2007 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6 REVIEW OF AREA COMMITTEES (REF: 8)

The Area Committee Support officer referred to the history and background of the development and operation of Area Committees in Luton and to the expectations set out in the Government's Consultation Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities'.

The latter set out a radical agenda for change including an ambition to empower citizens and communities to engage with and shape the democratic process.

The engagement and empowerment of Luton's citizens through the existing Area Committee process had been the subject of debate amongst Members and officers for some time, but without resolution.

A number of recommendations were therefore proposed, the first to consider and respond to the issues identified in the Government White paper, the remainder aimed at improving the current process by responding to constituents preferred method of engagement and making the most efficient use of participants time both at Ward Forum and Area Committee level.

In relation to the proposal to reconvene an officer working group to take forward proposals for change to the Area Committee process in responding to the requirements of the Government's White paper, the Chair asked when a first report back could be expected.

The Chief Executive advised that he would aim to submit an interim report by no later than 31st March 2007, with a final report approximately 3 months later.

Members agreed with the general principles proposed as set out in the Chief Executive's report.

A Member referred to the proposal that Police representatives should attend Area Ward Forums where issues of local interest were to be discussed, but not remain for the main Committee meeting. Whilst he supported this

proposal, he sought confirmation that Police representatives would remain where a town wide issue was to be considered at the main Area Committee meeting.

Members acknowledged the issues of timing of Area Committee meetings and the part played in this by lengthy presentations on consultation exercises.

Whilst it was agreed that Area Committees should be used as a method of raising awareness of consultation exercises only and not act as the medium for that consultation, a Member felt that the circulation of a bullet point information sheet to advise how constituents could engage with that consultation, would not be sufficient.

Instead he felt that a brief overview of the consultation exercise should be explained to those present, but lengthy question and answer sessions on the topic should be avoided.

The Area Committee Support officer advised that he was able to assist colleagues in arranging separate consultation evenings, independent of the Area Committee meeting, where this was felt to be necessary.

Members discussed the proposal to pilot two areas with extended ward Forum meetings, part of which would be devoted to receiving feedback from the Police on matters arising at the last meeting and to discuss new issues. It was felt that this should be trialled during the January meeting of Area Committees and a report on the outcome reported back to the Board at the end of that cycle.

If successful the pilot could be extended more widely, perhaps to include North Luton Area Committee, which comprised 5 Wards.

The Area Committee Support Officer suggested that, for the pilot areas, reports relevant to specific wards might be better received by Members and the local community at the Ward Forum, rather than at the Area Committee. Whilst some reports had cross conurbation implications and were more appropriate for consideration by Area Committees, others were specifically ward focused and might be of little or no interest to other areas.

Members were supportive of this approach.

In reply to a question about resourcing the facilitation of ward Forums, the Chair advised that it was the intention for Councillors to fulfil this role so as to engage with citizens as closely as possible.

In reply to a question about the Police's view on the new arrangements, the Area Committee Support Officer advised that the new format proposed was welcomed by the Police, despite some initial misunderstanding about the opportunities currently available to the Police to impart their issues at Area Committee meetings.

Members further discussed the method for handling consultation papers on Area Committee agendas. There was some debate as to whether the Committee Chair or an officer should present the item. The general consensus was that this should fall to the relevant officer. However, in order to manage the meeting efficiently, it was felt that a limit of five minutes for a brief overview should be applied where presentations were to feature on the main Area Committee agenda and that power point presentations should not be permitted.

Resolved: (i) That the outcome of the review of Area Committees as set out in the Chief Executive's report (Ref: 8), be noted.

(ii) That the Chief Executive be instructed to reconvene the officer working group that will embrace the fundamental purpose of the recent White Paper, to particularly review the role of the Area Committee and how it could be developed to take on the role of monitoring the Neighbourhood Plans as they are developed.

(iii) That the Chief Executive submit an interim report on the findings of the officer working group referred to at (ii) above to the Area Committee Board on 9th April 2007.

(iv) That the implementation of two pilot schemes, one in West Luton and the second in East Luton to:

- (a) extend the ward forums so that they operate from 18:30 Hours to 20:00 Hours;
- (b) allocate the first part of the ward forum e.g. 18:30 hours to 18:50 hours (including the pilots) to receiving feedback from the Police on matters from the last meeting and for the Police to record any new issues and thereafter the Police Depart. This to also embrace issues of community safety which should be recorded by the forum facilitator; and
- (c) each of the pilots receiving any reports specific to the ward at the ward forum,

be supported.

(v) That Chief Executive report the outcome of the pilots to the Area Committee Board meeting to be held on 29th January 2008.

(vi) That Area Committee agendas continue to receive information on presentations as a mechanism to advise constituents how to engage with a consultation process, but that this be restricted to a five minute overview and no power point presentations be permitted.

(vii) That Area Committee agendas contain a maximum of three or four discussion items only.

(viii) That no late applications under the area committee projects scheme will be considered.

(Note: The meeting ended at 6.25 pm)