AREA COMMITTEE BOARD

30TH MARCH 2004 AT 6.00PM

PRESENT: Councillor Simmons (Chair); Councillors P. Chapman, Johnston, Wates and Yasin

1   APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE (REF: 1)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor McGarvie.

2   MINUTES (REF: 2.1)

Resolved: That Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 24th November 2003 were taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3   AREA COMMITTEE DEVELOPMENT - AREA WARD FORUMS (REF: 7)

The Head of Local Democracy referred to the mini ward forums and service surgeries which had been piloted at two sets of Area Committees in October and November 2003 and January 2004 as mechanisms to engage the public as an alternative to Community Forums. Having trialled both options with both Area Committees, the mini Ward Forums had been the preferred option. This option appeared to be a more cross cutting and engaging process which promoted greater participation and cohesiveness towards community issues at a local level.

In light of the success of the mini ward forum pilot, it was recommended that they be formalised for all Area Committees and the Community Forums at Ward level, be discontinued.

Members of the Board were supportive of this approach.

The Head of Local Democracy indicated that delivery of the mini ward forums was an issue for further consideration. It was felt that both Members and officers would benefit from guidance and training on how to manage the process as both had differing skills levels in chairing and facilitating meetings.

A representative of the Recruitment and Development Unit's training team was present at the meeting. The Board was advised that

there were two approaches to identifying and addressing training need. The first was to analyse performance, identify what went well, celebrate those successes and then identify what could be done differently or better for the future. It was suggested that this would be most effective if carried out immediately after an Area Committee meeting.

It was suggested that self analysis, either in the manner suggested or using a self completion tick box sheet, was a useful way to do this.

The Board was advised that the second approach was to have a member of the training team present at an Area Committee meeting, who could observe the proceedings and intervene at an appropriate time. This was the more dangerous of the two options as it was a more challenging way to receive constructive criticism and the intervention would be taking place before the public.

Members preferred the first option but were not sure if there would be sufficient time at the end of a meeting to evaluate performance. The second option was not favored. It was accepted that facilitating and chairing skills needed to be developed, although it was acknowledged that the nature of business being considered and the number of attendees present were factors which affected the effectiveness of chairing an Area Committee. It was also felt that the main Area Committee and the mini Ward Forum would draw on different skills.

It was felt that consideration should also be given to the role of Members at Area Committees. A Member felt that their role was to listen to members of the public rather than contributing to the debate. This was felt to be a good approach but essential to let the public know this at the outset, so that less participation by Members was not interpreted by the public as lack of interest.

The Head of Local Democracy suggested that greater preparation would also assist in managing meetings more effectively. A 'game plan' for the meeting might be helpful in keeping the meeting on track and avoid duplication and repetitiveness. A pre-meeting was one way of doing this. It was also felt to be important to be clear to the public at meetings about what could and could not be delivered in response to their requests for action.

A Member suggested that a small handbook for conducting Area Committee meetings and mini Ward Forums might be helpful in achieving a consistent approach. Other ways delivering information, like flip charts or OHP's might also engage the audience more effectively.

It was suggested that discussion about the training and

development initiative proposed should be discussed within Members own Groups.

       Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

       (ii) That the Executive be requested (a) to agree that Community Forums be formally discontinued and (b) to adopt Mini-Ward Forums to take place prior to each Area Committee meeting.

       (iii) That in the first cycle of Area Committees after Annual Council (ie May and June 2004) an officer of the Training and Development Unit attend the Barnfield, Icknield, Limbury and Saints and the Biscot, High Town and Round Green Area Committee meetings to observe, listen and provide feedback on the conduct of the meetings and individual contributions by both officers and Members.

       (iv) That the feedback provided as a result of the (iii) above be reported to a future meeting of the Area Committee Board.

4   AREA COMMITTEE PROGRESS (REF: 8)

       The Area Committee Support Officer advised Members of the progress of Area Committees and how issues raised were being addressed and resolved.

       The Board was advised that only 7 out of 15 Ward Tours had been undertaken owing to Member unavailability. It was mentioned that working Members would sometimes have difficulty in attending daytime tours.

       The Board was advised of the dates of Area Committees and the Area Committee Board for 2004/2005. The Board was advised that, in trying to accommodate five rounds of Area Committees next year it had been necessary to identify dates during the recess period. On reflection, in view of the likely reduced participation by the public, Members' availability and difficulties for officers in resourcing meetings at that time, it was requested that the second round of Area Committees after Annual Council be deleted from the Draft Calendar of Meetings for 2004/05.

       Members acknowledged the difficulties and felt that this round of Committees could be deleted, provided further work was carried out to increase participation at the remaining four rounds of Area Committees. Expanding the database of participants by including voluntary groups, community safety participation groups and groups connected to the Luton Forum Assembly, was suggested. It was also suggested that Lutonline be used to advertise the achievements of Area Committees in responding to residents' requests.

The Area Committee Support Officer drew the Board's attention to a request received through the Safer Luton Partnership, to use the September and October round of Area Committees as a consultation mechanism to consider the Community Safety Strategy for 2005 - 2008, to enable the Crime and Disorder audit to be conducted. Members supported this request.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the second round of Area Committees after Annual Council, commencing on 15th July 2004 with the Dallow, Farley and South Area Committee and ending on 21st September 2004 with the Area Committee Board, be deleted from the Draft Calendar of Meetings 2004/05, subject to options for expanding the database of participants attending Area Committees by, for example, including voluntary groups, community safety participation groups and groups connected to the Luton Forum Assembly, being explored.

(iii) That the request received through the Safer Luton Partnership, to use the September and October round of Area Committees as a consultation mechanism to consider the Community Safety Strategy for 2005 - 2008, to enable the Crime and Disorder audit to be conducted, be approved.

(Note: The meeting ended at 7.25 pm)