1 Purpose

1.1 This report informs Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee on performance and achievements of the Local Assemblies programme over the last 12 to 18 months.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members of the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee are recommended to note the content of this report and its appendices and to consider the questions raised in 4.6.

3 Policy Context

3.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act came into effect on 1 April 2009. It makes it a duty on all local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out 'any of its functions' by providing information, consulting or 'involving in another way'. The Local Assemblies programme is a key aid to the Council in fulfilling this duty.

3.2 In May 2007 the Mayor’s Commission on empowering communities and neighbourhoods recommended that the London Borough of Lewisham introduce local ward assemblies for each of the borough’s 18 wards. The Commission believed that these localised bodies, defined by the active involvement of the ward councillors, would enable the people living and working in each area to have a stronger and more direct influence in shaping their local community, supporting an ongoing process for identifying and resolving local concerns and implementing local solutions. The Local Assemblies programme was established in March 2008.

3.3 The local assemblies programme is helping to deliver the Lewisham Sustainable Community Strategy priority outcome ‘empowered and responsible - where people can be actively involved in their local area and contribute to supportive communities.’ The programme is also helping to deliver the corporate priority ‘community leadership and empowerment – developing opportunities for the active participation and engagement of people in the life of the community’; and individual projects funded by the assemblies help to deliver other corporate priorities.
4. Local Assemblies Programme Update

4.1 Appendix 1 sets out:

- An update on Local Assemblies
- Key results from the borough wide survey 2012
- Questions for consideration at the Committee meeting

4.2 Local assemblies are coming to the end of their fifth full year. The average attendance at assembly meetings during 2012-13, to date, is 87. This remains one of the highest levels of attendance since the programme began. Full performance statistics can be found in appendix 1.

4.3 To supplement the attendance at assembly meetings; and in recognition that not everyone can or wants to attend meetings; the programme continues to engage people outside of meetings in a variety of ways. In 2011-12 the number of people who participated outside meetings exceeded those who attended meetings. Examples of different forms of engagement can be found in appendix 1.

4.4 The assemblies continue to develop and deliver action plans, focusing on issues and concerns of most interest to people in particular wards. Some of these actions are delivered through funding (including the Assembly Fund, but also identifying other funding sources and collaborative working with other agencies); others are community-led, whilst others influence decisions. Case studies of assembly achievements can be found in appendix 1.

4.5 The 2012-13 Assembly Fund has been almost fully allocated. The £337,500 fund across 18 wards has generated projects ranging from community gardens to employment support services. Assemblies have been varied in their approach to distributing their funds; some using a traditional participatory budgeting style approach, others ‘commissioning’ their fund against specific actions identified by the assembly.

4.6 The programme continues to explore ways to keep assembly meetings and work outside of them fresh. Examples include working groups, neighbourhood forums, events and using local skills within the community.

4.7 The programme continues to use borough-wide and localised communications channels. 2012 saw a number of new initiatives launched, including a film, ‘what could you achieve’ campaign, event at the Blackheath Big Screen, and supporting assemblies to use social media more.

4.8 The Local Assemblies programme undertook a borough-wide survey to gather more in-depth feedback about assemblies. The survey was aimed at people who regularly attend, to find out how they feel about the assembly and what it achieves, what could be improved and what was most important to them. The survey was also aimed at people who have never attended a meeting to find out a bit more about what might encourage them to attend and what prevents them currently. The results of the survey were fed back to the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee and are available on request from the team.
4.6 The committee is asked to consider and discuss the following questions at
the meeting on 26 February.

- What do the committee feel the main purpose of the assemblies
  programme is?

- Bearing in mind reduced resources in times of austerity, does the
  committee have thoughts on how to best maximise the capacity and
  resources of the community to work with us to deliver assemblies; and
  therefore where to focus Council resources.

5. Financial implications

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6. Legal implications

6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7. Conclusion

7.1 The Local Assemblies Programme continues to deliver formal meetings
  alongside engagement outside of meetings; and support for communities
  and local groups to deliver key actions and priorities. The programme
  continues to perform well, with some of its best ever statistics after 5 years.
  However, austerity measures will mean reduced resources to deliver
  assemblies in the future, and the programme will be seeking to look at how it
  can prioritise its resources and help support communities to work with us to
  deliver the key elements of the programme.

If there are any queries on this report please contact Petra Marshall, Local
Assemblies Manager, 020 8314 7034.

Appendix 1: Local assemblies report February 2013
Appendix 2: Local assemblies survey 2012 full results
Appendix 3: Local Assemblies annual report 2012