

Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee		
Title	Local Assemblies Review	
Contributor	Executive Director for Community Services	Item: 6
Class	Part 1 (open)	21 January 2014

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee with information on the performance and achievements of the Local Assemblies programme during the 2012/13 financial year. It also identifies areas for the potential future development of the Assemblies programme.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Members of the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee are recommended to note the content of this report and to consider the questions raised in 4.7.

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 places 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 London Borough of Lewisham 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 2012/13 represented the fifth full year of the Local Assembly programme. Average attendance at Assembly meetings for the full 2012/13 year rose slightly to 77 people from 73 in 2011/12. Feedback from meetings suggests that overall the Assemblies are regarded by residents as effective in supporting local communities, with over 61% of meeting attendees agreeing that Assemblies allow them to influence decisions affecting their local areas. Of those attending meetings, 89% stated that the Assembly allowed them to learn more about local issues, with over 80% stating that the Assembly brought people from different backgrounds together and over 85% agreeing that the Assembly helped build good relations between local people. The programme also reached large numbers of new people, with 37.5% of meeting attendees confirming that they were attending for the first time. This is the highest annual percentage of new attendees achieved to date.
- 4.2 The level of engagement expressed by meeting attendees has also been reflected in the programme's ability to engage people outside of meetings. For example, the programme has developed youth forums, initiated focus groups and worked with a range of residents to identify local priorities, resulting in a total of 12,418 individual engagements during the course of the year.
- 4.3 All Local Assemblies continue to review their priorities to ensure that they reflect the needs of their respective local areas. Each Local Assembly has identified four to five priorities. The priorities identified are wide ranging but all 18 Assemblies have identified youth facilities and activities as a common priority. Other areas which have been identified by a majority of Assemblies include: public parks and local facilities (16 Assemblies), environmental issues including tackling graffiti and improving and safeguarding the environment (14 Assemblies), traffic management and parking (13 Assemblies), and anti-social behaviour (13 Assemblies). Other priority areas identified include facilities for the elderly, town centre development and housing.
- 4.4 In 2012/13, each Assembly was allocated a fund of £15,000 to run local projects. In identifying projects to be funded, the Assemblies have proved to have been guided by their priorities and to have allocated funding according to local need, addressing issues identified in their action plans, which have been reviewed and, in many cases, updated during the course of the year.
- 4.5 Each Assembly has a fully voluntary co-ordinating group which plans its work between Assembly meetings and is supported by the Council-employed co-ordinator. The local co-ordinating group has the active involvement of elected members and a range of individuals who have volunteered to support their local Assembly. A number of these individuals bring organisational and communication skills which are invaluable in facilitating the work of the Assembly programme.
- 4.6 In the main, this report covers Assembly activity in the 2012/13 financial year. However, since the end of March 2013, there have been significant changes in terms of the re-focusing of staff resources to support Assemblies which have subsequently required Assemblies to review and prioritise the input of their allocated co-ordinator resource. Under the new arrangements, each Assembly's

co-ordinator resource amounts to approximately one day per week, with the co-ordinator role being undertaken by Council Development Officers alongside additional grant making and other community development responsibilities. Within this time allocation, co-ordinators work closely with local co-ordinating groups to support Assembly planning and take forward Assembly priorities.

4.7 In receiving this report, the committee is asked to take into account the following:

- How Local Assemblies can best foster community action
- How Local Assemblies can jointly develop areas of work which are of mutual interest
- How Local Assemblies can continue to engage with communities outside of meetings and maintain a strong and pro-active profile in challenging fiscal times

5. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7. Conclusion

The Local Assembly programme is continuing to show signs of achieving its aims. 2012/13 was a year of consolidation of progress made in previous years and 2013/14 is anticipated to be a year of further positive development despite initial challenges presented by the re-focusing of co-ordinating support to Assemblies.

If there are any queries on this report please contact Winston Castello, Community Enterprise Manager, on 020 8314 7729.

Appendix A: Local Assemblies Review presentation