Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee		
Title	Local assemblies update	
Contributor	Community Enterprise Manager	Item	6
Class	Part 1 (open)	03 February 2015

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 2013/14 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 paragraph 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 places a duty on a local authority 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   Prior to the Act, 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's objective was that these localised bodies, defined by the active involvement of ward councillors, would enable the people living and working in each ward 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 particularly helps 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'. Average attendance at local assemblies is a key performance indicator for measuring our success in meeting these priorities. Individual projects funded by the assemblies also help to deliver other corporate priorities.

4.   Administration of Assemblies

4.1   Each Assembly has an individual fully voluntary co-ordinating group which plans its work between Assembly meetings and is supported by the Council-employed Development Officer. 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. These individuals bring organisational and communication skills which are invaluable in facilitating the work of the Assembly programme.

Co-ordinating groups meet in advance of Assembly meetings to plan agendas and ensure that actions from previous meetings have been completed. Communication between meetings generally takes place through e-mail updates, and the Assembly Development Officer works closely with individual co-ordinating group members as well as ward councillors. Each co-ordinating group has evolved its way of operating to meet with local requirements, and individuals with particular skills have been encouraged to contribute to the work of the groups. Some groups are formal in their meetings, whilst others have a less formal approach.

Groups consist of 9-10 people, although attendance varies. In 2011, co-ordinating groups were issued with guidance. This clearly sets out details of membership, chairing and guidance on meeting planning, engagement and publicity, as well as other areas of operation. Responsibilities also include consideration of evaluation data, initial scrutiny of funding applications for eligibility and deliverability, and regular review of the Assembly Action Plan with associated recommendations to the full Assembly.

During the course of the year, Assemblies have considered the style and content of meetings, including the various approaches taken to chairing meetings. Assemblies have endeavoured to make their discussions as interactive and participative as possible by taking varying approaches at different meetings. Feedback from participants suggests that having table-based discussions provides a good opportunity for more individuals to participate.

5.   Local Assemblies Programme Update

5.1   2013/14 represented the 6th full year of the Local Assembly programme.

Average attendance at Assembly meetings and events for the full 2013/14 year rose to 91 people from 77 in 2012/13, with an overall attendance of 5,286 for the year.

At each Assembly meeting, participants are asked to provide feedback. An analysis of this feedback confirms the following for the year:
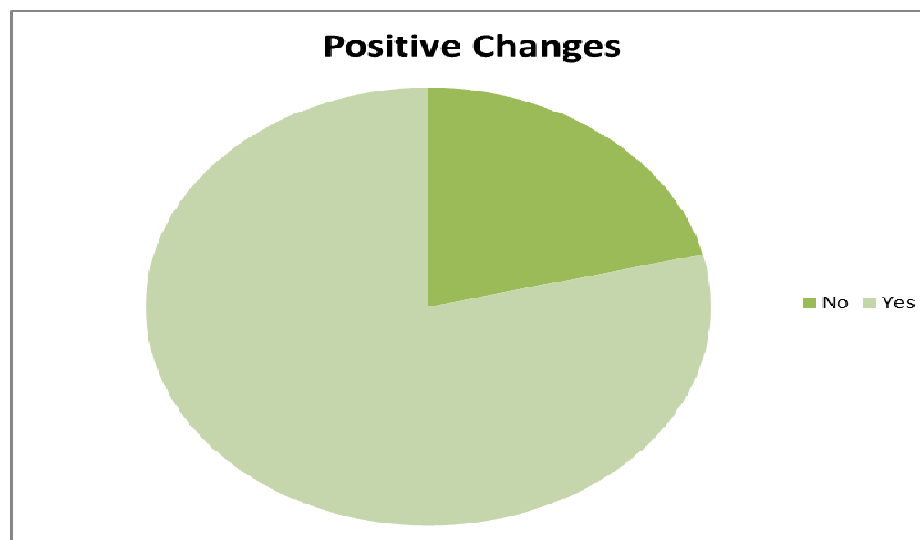
- 92% stated that attending Assembly meetings had helped them to understand local issues better
- 68% took the view that the Assembly allowed them to influence local decisions
- 70% stated that they felt included and able to give their viewpoint. This is a concern as it represents a drop from 81% in 2012/13
- 75% felt that Assembly meetings met their expectations.

With regard to demographics, the proportion of young people attending Assembly meetings continues to be low. Only 3% of those attending meetings in the last year were defined as young people, which represents a reduction on 4.7% in the previous year. This indicates a further need for Assemblies to address young people's engagement. On the other hand, encouragingly, the proportion of people who considered themselves to have a disability increased from 13% to 23%.

The proportion of attendees from BAME backgrounds stood at 34%, a reduction from 37% in the previous year.

The programme also reached large numbers of new people, with 34% of meeting attendees confirming that they were attending for the first time, although this is a reduction on the previous year.

In addition to the surveys undertaken at Assembly meetings, an online survey of local residents was undertaken to identify levels of awareness of and engagement with Assemblies. The survey, which was distributed via Lewisham Life and also available on the Council website, elicited 472 responses. A significant number (294) of those who responded had not previously attended Assembly meetings, but of the 208 who had an opinion on whether Assemblies had made a difference in their local area, 79% felt the difference was positive, as illustrated in the chart below:

5.2   All Local Assemblies continue to review their priorities to ensure that they reflect the needs of their respective local areas. A varied approach was taken this year by Assemblies in determining and acting on priorities. Assemblies find that exercises to review priorities prove an effective way of engaging with residents, increasing attendance and levels of debate at meetings and improving resident "ownership" of priorities.

Crofton Park – Open Engagement

Crofton Park Assembly felt it was important to canvass opinions beyond the usual attendees at meetings to ensure that their priorities reflected the views of the widest possible range of residents even if they were not able to attend assembly meetings. They devised an online survey that sought opinion on what the priorities should be as well as soliciting ideas about local issues that could be addressed.

5.3 In 2013/14, each Assembly was allocated a fund of £15,000 to run local projects. £2,500 of this sum is a discretionary fund which can be utilised directly by Ward councillors to address other areas which may arise during the course of the year or are not identified by residents as key priorities but which still have an impact on the local area.

All Assemblies have reviewed their approach to the allocation of funds in the last year. Approximately 50% of Assemblies have taken a full commissioning approach, through which applications have been invited from organisations that it is felt are able to deliver projects to meet priorities. This approach has the advantage of the Assembly being able to set clear boundaries and engage in a dialogue with potential projects to best meet identified needs.

Other approaches taken include partial commissioning and a general call for applications. This mixed approach is undertaken in some wards, including Crofton Park and Perry Vale. In both cases, the main priority has proved to be work with young people. Discussions were therefore held with relevant organisations to achieve focused projects, with proportions of funding remaining open for wider applications to support other needs identified by local organisations.

A number of Assemblies operate an open application process. This approach often results in an increased number of applications but requires the coordinating group to carefully sift and analyse applications to ensure they represent value for money and are robust and deliverable. The advantage of this approach is that it encourages organisations which have not previously worked with the assembly to come forward. This sometimes provides a catalyst for further involvement by organisation users and supporters who subsequently attend Assembly meetings to promote the benefits of their work. This has been the case in Bellingham and Grove Park wards.

An increasing number of Assemblies use the marketplace approach to enable funding applicants to engage with Assembly participants. The marketplace allows for a dialogue to take place between residents and potential projects, followed by a voting process. This approach further increases resident engagement and ownership of projects, as well as offering an opportunity for vibrant dialogue between residents and local organisations.

Once funds have been agreed, Assemblies invite successful projects to provide updates at meetings. These presentations are often very popular because they enable residents to find out how projects are progressing and to review the work they have undertaken. This also provides an opportunity for groups to promote what they do and enables residents to access their provision.
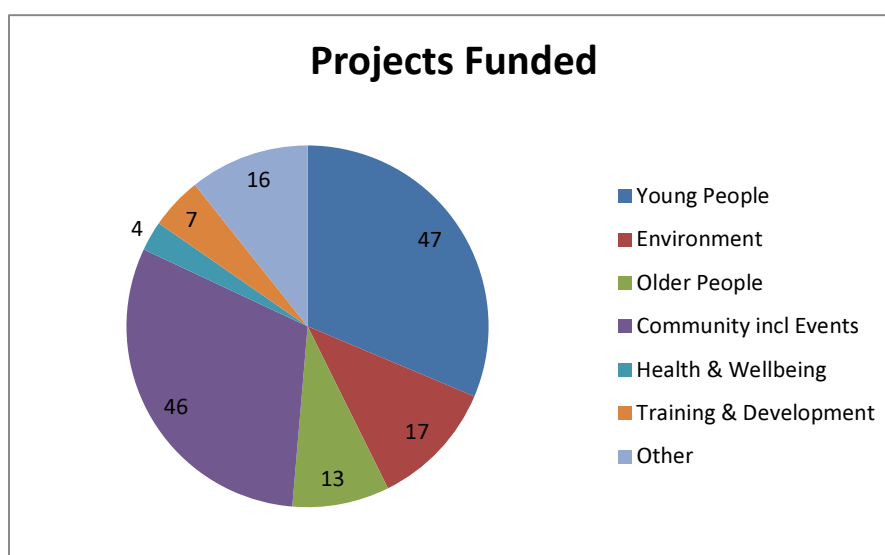
Evelyn – Working Together

Many successful projects have resulted in additional funds being levered in, including the Evelyn Ward "Working Together" Project, a collaborative effort which almost doubled the £15,000 available across the ward to £27,878 through a range of partners supporting different aspects of six out of seven of the individual projects under the "Working Together" umbrella. The collaborative approach in Evelyn Ward also brought different groups together to work on projects jointly which has promoted increased joint working and the sharing of resources outside Assembly

projects. Local people have also had the opportunity to get involved and have volunteered on three of the projects.

5.4   A total of 150 projects were funded in 2013/14. Of these, 50 were funded at a level of £2,000 or over. A further 59 were funded at £1,000 - £2,000. 26 were funded at £500 - £1,000 and 15 received funding of less than £500.

Of the 150 groups funded, the highest proportion used the funding to deliver young people-focused projects. Other areas where higher proportions of projects were delivered included environmentally-focused projects, work with older people, work focused on health and wellbeing, and training and development. See chart below which illustrates the distribution of projects:

Projects Funded

Colour	Category
■	Young People
■	Environment
■	Older People
■	Community incl Events
■	Health & Wellbeing
■	Training & Development
■	Other

Young People: 47
Environment: 17
Older People: 13
Community incl Events: 46
Health & Wellbeing: 4
Training & Development: 7
Other: 16

5.5   During the course of the year, through the combined approaches to distributing funds described above, a number of new initiatives have been established. These include:

Perry Vale - Young Lewisham Project

In Perry Vale, the Assembly agreed to fund an initiative to be operated by the Young Lewisham project, which involved young people working with dementia sufferers. The project is being delivered in partnership with Bromley Mind providing young people with dementia awareness training.

Evelyn – Community Capacity Building

With Community Capacity Building as one of its priorities, the Evelyn Assembly has identified a prime need to offer local people with limited funds alternative forms of transport to get to important appointments such as the Jobcentre and housing office. The Bike Freedom Club project funds the 999 Club in Deptford to lend bicycles to local residents supporting them in attending appointments which could otherwise lead to sanctions, with the added benefit of improving fitness and wellbeing. With the support of the Assembly, contact has been made with

Wandsworth Prison which has provided free bicycles through its bicycle recycling work and the Assembly has met other start-up costs.

Forest Hill - Re-Connect Programme

In Forest Hill, the Assembly identified a need to raise aspirations and change behaviour amongst young people. In 2013/14, this was achieved through the Re-Connect Programme, through providing an environment where young people were supported in transitioning positively into adulthood.

Grove Park - Communication

In Grove Park ward, community communication remains one of the Assembly priorities. To tackle this, the Coordinating Group invited a representative from Streetlife to the November Assembly. She was provided with an information stall as part of a marketplace event and given a place on the agenda for the formal part of the meeting. With approximately 100 people in attendance this Assembly was the ideal forum in which to pitch Streetlife and provide some practical examples as to why it would be good for Grove Park. Feedback from Assembly attendees was extremely positive and the Assembly agreed to pilot a Streetlife initiative, with key local organisations and ward councillors all agreeing to promote the site.

5.6   During the course of the year, Assemblies have acted as a catalyst for some key areas of **community-led action**, including:

Catford South – Bulbs in Bloom

Residents in Catford South have worked with the Assembly to bring springtime flowers to the ward since 2013. Following consultation with local residents, over 500 bags of bulbs have been given away to individuals to plant in their front gardens, pots, window boxes and other suitable containers. 4000 bulbs were also supplied to schools and community groups to plant in local community spaces.

The Assembly worked in partnership with Torridon Library and Holy Cross Primary school, which acted as bulb collection points. Both sites expressed how they had benefitted from their involvement, with the library in particular stating that the initiative had facilitated the registration of new members. The Assembly itself has also gained a number of new members, with the bulb project acting as an effective engagement tool. The initiative is now extending to Rushey Green Assembly which has voted for an additional bulbs in bloom initiative.

Evelyn Youth Partnership

The Evelyn Youth Partnership is formed of local organisations and residents working with young people and was set up by the Evelyn Assembly in response to resident requests for more opportunity for local young people (18-24). Through the partnership, a bid was submitted for Jobcentre Plus Flexible Support Fund funding to develop an outreach project for young people aged 18-24 who were out of work and were not engaging with the benefits system. Young people engaged through the project accessed additional training, work experience and placement opportunities through local social enterprise, ECO Learning. The project achieved the following:

- An increase in young people, including young offenders, interacting with the benefits system;
- Action planning with young people to support the identification of goals and access to relevant training and work experience support;
- The identification of youth safety as a key issue which is now being tackled through the project.

5.7 A key part of Assembly meetings incorporates input from senior Council officers with a range of responsibilities. Through dialogue with local residents, Council officers have gained greater insight into resident views on particular issues and have been able to highlight how these can be taken forward within the Council. These discussions help support residents in **influencing decisions** which are of particular importance to them. For example:

- Sydenham Assembly, with the Sydenham Society, worked to influence progress in developing the important local site previously occupied by the Greyhound Public House. Assembly members worked to raise concerns with the Council Planning Department and Mayor, resulting in a project which had been dormant for a significant period of time being reactivated and a decision and timetable being agreed for completing the development;
- Blackheath Assembly was able to influence a review of the Council's resident permit pricing policy, stemming from work to support an individual parent/carer;
- In Lewisham Central, the Assembly facilitated discussions between residents and the developers of the Lewisham Gateway Project. This has enabled residents to be better informed of planned developments and to provide feedback to developers on the potential impact of specific plans.

5.8 Assemblies would be unable to operate effectively without generating high levels of **engagement and participation**. These are achieved in different ways in different wards, including wards with particular challenges. The approach taken to achieving effective engagement and participation varies across Assemblies. In some instances, there are well-developed partnership arrangements between the Assemblies and local voluntary and community sector organisations. This is particularly the case in Telegraph Hill and Bellingham, where local councillors and community organisations work closely together in complementing the work of the Assembly. In other instances, as in the example below, specific engagement activities are undertaken**:**

Rushey Green – talk days and community engagement

The Rushey Green Assembly was one of the first Assemblies to start using 'talk days' as an important tool for community engagement. By joining up with other larger events in the area, talk days have been was a chance to take the Assembly on the road and broaden local resident understanding of the purpose and aims of the Assembly.

One of the main benefits of talk days was found to be an improved focus on identifying Ward priorities and ways in which to increase inclusivity and reach a wider audience. In December 2014, a different approach was taken to engaging the community as a result of issues identified by the Chair through the talk days. This resulted in a very successful, interactive session through which people fed in thoughts and ideas for the next year's action plan. Further activities are in progress

as a result of community engagement so that residents can ask questions remotely if they are unable to physically attend meetings. If this approach is successful, it will be rolled out to all Assemblies, although with careful monitoring to ensure the meetings retain a strong physical presence.

5.9   Assemblies view community-wide **events** as making a key contribution to community cohesion and the enhancement of community spirit. In the past year, Assemblies have supported a number of local events which have further increased local awareness of Assembly work and have contributed to community cohesion. Examples include:

Blackheath Village Day

Following community representations to the Assembly, funding of £2,000 was contributed by the Assembly to a group which worked closely with the Blackheath Society to plan for an event which took place alongside the Christmas Lights Switch On on December 6 2014. Residents and local organisations undertook separate fundraising and collaboration and the day attracted more than 2,000 people. Contributors included the Jimmy Mizen Foundation Musicians and the Samaritan Choir.

Brockley Max

The Brockley Max Festival is a nine day community arts festival in Brockley, Crofton Park Ladywell and Honor Oak Park. In 2014, the festival took place from 30 May-7 June, running 45 events in external venues and local bars, cafes, libraries, churches and community halls, and attracting more than 5,000 attendees. The festival gave opportunities for over 300 performers and 50 volunteers (33% of whom were under 25) to gain valuable work experience, including customer service, event management, fundraising and administration. At least 85% of volunteers have indicated their interest in participating again in 2015.

Over 40 local businesses supported the festival through sponsorship, advertising, having a stall and giving raffle prizes. This enabled them to increase their business both directly through sales and indirectly through showing their support for a community event.

5.10   **Other Developments in 2013/14**

Section 106

During 2013/14, Assemblies began to be consulted on the use of Section 106 for their respective areas. Assemblies have begun consulting widely on the use of funds e.g., in Whitefoot, the Assembly undertook an extensive consultation exercise, informing residents about opportunities available through Section 106 arrangements and undertaking an associated residents' survey.

This initiative represents further opportunities for Assemblies to engage with residents on important areas of local provision.

Neighbourhood Forums

During 2013/14, a number of Assemblies were instrumental in establishing partnerships to develop Neighbourhood Forums. In both Crofton Park and Grove Park, for example, the Assembly worked closely with key civic partners to facilitate the development of Neighbourhood Forums which will be instrumental in developing local plans for their respective areas.

Big Budget Challenge

During the autumn of 2014, all Local Assemblies organised events to enable residents to participate in the Big Budget Challenge on Lewisham Council's financial position, requiring £85m of cuts. A number of Assemblies gave residents online access to the Big Budget Toolkit and others encouraged residents and local organisations to engage with the process.

Main Grants Neighbourhood Development

It is envisaged that Assemblies will play a key role in the development and delivery of the Neighbourhood Development strand of the revised Lewisham Council 2015/18 Main Grants Programme. Local Assembly Co-ordinating Groups will work closely with delivery organisations to ensure that Main Grant applicant organisations delivering neighbourhood projects complement Assembly priorities. Successful Main Grants applicant organisations will have a very clear role in supporting engagement with Assemblies through their Council-funded projects.

6.   **Conclusion**

The present Assembly Programme has been in operation for six full years and has continued to remain relevant to local residents. In looking ahead the service will seek to build on the programme's success, share good practice across wards whilst continuing to tackle the ongoing challenges of deepening the reach of assemblies but also looking for the most effective way to deliver the programme with diminishing resources.

For further information, please contact Liz Dart, Head of Culture and Community Development on 020 8314 8637.