1. **Purpose**

   This report provides an update for the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee.

2. **Recommendation/s**

   Members of the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee are recommended to note the content of this report and the future actions listed in section 5.

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’. Individual projects funded by the assemblies also help to deliver other corporate priorities.

4. **Local Assemblies Update**

4.1 This section provides an update on Local Assembly activity in the last year.
4.2 2017-18 represents the tenth full year of the Local Assembly programme. Average attendance at Assembly meetings for the full 2016-17 year was 163, compared to 107 the previous year. This figure is high as many assemblies will organise at least one social event which will attract a larger turnout. As at the end of January 2018, the average attendance for the formal assembly meeting is 92, this figure does not include Assembly events. We have seen some very large formal assembly meetings including 170 attendees at Catford South and 134 attendees at Grove Park.

An analysis of 2017/18 across 6 wards selected at random shows that 34% of assembly attendees stated that they were attending the meeting for the first time and that 87% of all attendees stated that they will definitely attend another assembly meeting.

4.3 Coordinating Groups continue to play an active role in the planning of the assembly meetings and at present we have 134 active Coordinating Group volunteers (not including ward councillors). Coordinating Groups are integral to the programme and a good Coordinating Group will fulfil many functions including:

- Planning the assembly meeting
- Evaluating the feedback, what worked / did not work
- Ensuring that the assembly is representative of the ward and fully inclusive
- Helping to promote the assembly
- Provide information to assemblies to assist them in making decisions
- Where relevant, help to assess funding applications to ensure that they meet the assembly's agreed criteria, benefit the ward, are value for money, that there is evidence of local need and that they are not duplicating existing provision.

Several Coordinating Group events, bringing representatives from all Coordinating Groups together, have now been held at the Civic Suite with a further two scheduled to take place in June 2018 and October 2018. These events are very well attended by both Ward Councillors and Coordinating Group volunteers and represent an ideal opportunity for the Groups to get together to exchange views and ideas. Key Speakers are invited to these events and subjects covered are generally more generic and have included Emergency Planning, Sugar Smart and Fundraising. The June 2018 Meeting will include Highways and consultation on the forthcoming Local Implementation Plan (LIP).

4.4 Currently each Assembly is allocated a fund of £15,000 to run local projects. £2,500 of this sum is known as the Councillor Discretionary Fund and this 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 the Assemblies review their approach to the allocation of funds. Most assemblies are now using more of a Small Grants process to allocating funds. However, wards such as Catford South will ensure that applications are targeted into certain areas identified by the assembly.

A number of Assemblies simply advertise generally for applications. Prior to this the Coordinating Group will agree the criteria including the maximum amount that an organisation can apply for. 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, are robust / deliverable, benefit the ward and are not duplicating existing provision. This will mean that some applications are rejected upon application and others have been extensively worked upon and improved before going to the assembly.

The advantage of this approach is that it encourages organisations which have not previously worked with the assembly to come forward and the creation of new local organisations. 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 many wards. In Grove Park ward this approach is so successful that some organisations were asked to take a ‘year out’ from applying to give new organisations the opportunity to apply and deliver projects.

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. Marketplace Assembly meetings are hugely popular and extremely well attended. Feedback is generally very positive and residents welcome the opportunity to have a genuine say in which projects are funded and relish the informal atmosphere. Piloted at the Grove Park Assembly, the voting mechanism for the marketplace has now evolved with a fairer system in place which negates tactical voting, a common past criticism.

Once funds have been agreed, Assemblies require successful projects to provide regular 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, gain volunteers and enable residents to access their provision.

4.5 A total of 205 projects were funded in 2016/17. Of these, 14 were for over £3,000, with the highest award being for £9,000 in Lewisham Central ward for a project titled Greening Lewisham which is all about renewing public spaces within the town centre. The lowest award was £150 towards the Christmas Pantomime in Sydenham.

In 2017/18 (as of the end of February 2018) 174 projects have benefitted from Assembly Funding. Of these, 3 are for over £3,000, with the highest figure awarded £8,060 in Lewisham Central ward for the second stage of Greening Lewisham.
This year we are seeing a much greater variety of projects which benefit different areas particularly around the Environment, Events and Community and Arts and Crafts.
It is again encouraging to note that the Assembly Fund process continues to attract new applications following on from the significant increase in 2016-17.

4.6 During the course of the year, through the combined approaches to distributing funds described above, a number of new initiatives have been established. In addition, Assemblies have acted as a catalyst for some key areas of community-led action, including:

**Crofton Park, Cinderella Line** - This is a new organisation supported and funded by the Crofton Park Local Assembly that has been set-up to improve the train service from Crofton Park Station. It is working closely with the Crofton Park Assembly and the Neighbourhood Forum as it campaigns for services to London Victoria to be reinstated. In addition to improving the service the Group is working with the assembly to improve disabled access on to trains at Crofton Park. This was a substantive agenda item at the assembly on January 27 2018.

**Evelyn, Community Infrastructure Levy Pilot** - In response to a request from the Assembly for more information on Section 106 funding, officers have been working closely with the Head of Planning on a full report and the transition to Community Infrastructure Levy. New processes will be trialled in Evelyn Ward before roll out across the borough. Deptford Folk, a park user group for Deptford Park and Folkestone Gardens have been undertaking consultations with a range of residents at their events to identify potential projects and these will be included in the wider consultation.

**Grove Park Job Fair** – In partnership with the Chinbrook Action Residents Team (ChART), a Job Fair was organised alongside the Grove Park Assembly at Coopers Lane School. Many local organisations were involved with around 150 attendees being present at the event. It was so successful that a further event is planned.

**Catford South, Dementia Friendly Community** - The Lewisham Dementia Action Alliance (LDAA) was formally launched in May 2015 and is Lewisham’s vehicle to become a more Dementia Friendly Community. Dementia Friendly Communities are defined by Alzheimer’s Society as a community ‘in which people with dementia are empowered to have aspirations and feel confident, knowing they can contribute and participate in activities that are meaningful to them’.

Becoming a dementia-friendly community has been recognised as a process taking several years. The LDAA feels that becoming a Dementia-friendly community in an area as big as Lewisham is likely to prove challenging. Therefore, it was decided that the process of becoming a dementia-friendly community should start in a geographically defined area as a pilot project to be rolled out across the entire borough in the future.

The Catford South area and local assembly has been chosen to work to become Lewisham’s first dementia friendly community for a number of reasons:

- A ward with the second highest number of residents above the age of 65 and has a higher proportion of people living with dementia compared to Lewisham as a whole.
- Initial conversations with councillors and key members of the local assembly have established a real interest in Catford South becoming a dementia-friendly community.
• Catford South has very active and engaged community organisations who are keen to work together and work on new projects. In June 2015 Catford South and Lewisham were formally accredited as working towards Dementia Friendly Community Status. Working with the Catford Assembly has been an extremely positive experience and supported the on-going development of the LDAA. The networks it operates in has enabled the assembly members and Catford South residents to be much more aware of dementia as well as supporting local residents through direct one-to-one support and more accessible groups, shops and venues which supports local residents living with dementia feeling confident and remaining active members of their community.

**Brockley, Street Trees for Living** - Street Trees for Living is the new name for Brockley Society's street tree campaign. Since 2012 it has raised enough money to fund 250 street trees, with about half of these already labelled and planted. The assembly has played a key role in supporting this initiative including identifying preferred sites and each year funding tree initiatives. Street Trees for Living is now viewed as the ‘community borough authority’ on street trees and has grown beyond the ward boundaries of Brockley to engage borough wide.

**Perry Vale, Lark in the Park** - Lark in the Park started in 2014 as an Assembly-led event, bringing people in Perry Vale ward together for an inclusive day of fun in the park. Based in Mayow Park, this event which remains Assembly-led, has become immensely popular with local residents, bringing out around 800 people each year. The original format of a few local community groups setting up their stalls in the park, has now grown to encompass over 25 community, sports and social providers, and a range of activities from t-shirt painting and placard-making, to “golden goal” competition, and “boxercise” tasters! For 2018, the Assembly are in negotiation with a local community arts organisation to bring a mix of professional and community musicians to add to the fun.

**Bellingham, The Pye Project** – The assembly is once again supporting the Pye Project with its Double Edge programme for Schools. The programme is designed to effectively prevent the onset of harmful lifestyle choices for young people involved or considered at risk of becoming involved in knife/weapon carrying and gang activity. It provides young people with essential information as well as support and guidance to develop attitudes and thinking skills to overcome many of the known issues presented by a small but significant number of children and young people in Bellingham. Key areas will include knife crime prevention, stop and search, youth crime and gangs. The programme is an intervention course and supports a cohort of up to fifteen young people referred by Sedgehill School. Any person aged between 11 and 14, identified as being at risk of becoming involved in knife crime or serious youth violence can be referred to the Double Edge programme.

**Blackheath, Age Exchange, The Magic Table** – The assembly is supporting Age Exchange to install a new invention called Tovertafel (or ‘Magic Table’). The Tovertafel is a little box that can be mounted on the ceiling. Inside the box is a high-quality projector, infrared sensors, speaker, and processor that work together to project the games onto the table. Because the colourful objects respond to hand and arm movements, users get to play with the light itself. Tovertafel was developed to stimulate activity – physical, mental and social – in people with late stage dementia.
Lewisham Central, Hither Green Murals – This exciting project at Hither Green Station is in two parts. The first is to create a stunning place making mural on Springbank Road and the second will transfer the station’s waiting room into the ‘Hither Green Living Room’ which will include a community library.

Downham, The London Garden Workshop – This is a project to engage and educate the local community with a view to the planning and cultivation of both edible and non-edible plants. Activities will take place in a relaxed and informal environment enabling both young and older people to connect and develop friendships.

Sydenham, Greener Homecroft Planters - Funded by Sydenham Assembly, this local residents group received a small grant of £600 to green their street with a set of planters to be planned, planted up and cared for by the community. As well as improving their local environment and enjoying some healthy outdoor activity, residents were able to report some great added value in the shape of the greater community cohesion including plans for a street party and a Facebook group for the road which is proving really useful for sharing information, requests and other street news.

Rushey Green, Felday Road Street Party – This was a street party with a theme of celebrating diversity. The event was inter-generational as well as promoting community cohesion. Specifically, children were involved in co-designing the programme including the preparations nearer the event by making bunting, decorating their houses and decorating cakes as they were this year. The fire engines, health stall and mounted police and police cadets helped introduce young people to different community services and raise vocational aspirations. As part of the inter-generational focus a number of retired residents are part of the resident’s volunteer group and help with the organising of the street party and on the day. This really helped everyone to get to know their neighbours both those who have lived in the area for a long time and more recent residents.

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Soundbites

Catford Town Centre Regeneration - “We’re [Team Catford] currently in the process of evaluating last year’s engagement efforts and achievements [around the Regeneration plans for Catford] and updating the engagement strategy…Results have shown that the most effective face to face method of engagement has been through the ward assemblies. On average we’ve had 104 attendees at each event, with 89% of people saying it was the primary way they receive information.”
Information via Filigree communications / quote from Deborah Efemini, Team Catford Jan 2018
Grove Park Assembly attendee – “I’ve not long moved from Greenwich and we had nothing like this. This is a really good way of finding out the local news and the fact that you hold the meeting in the ward is inspired.”

Crofton Park Assembly attendee – “Such a lovely atmosphere at the meeting with good people doing good things and lots of interesting news. Thank you for having the meeting at Ewart Road as it’s close to where I live.”

Lewisham Central Assembly attendee – “I didn’t have any expectations, but I was happy that I was given my say. I learnt quite a lot as well.”

Lee Green Assembly attendee – “A wide range of information was provided.”

Perry Vale Assembly attendee – “The meeting was very informative with some useful tips.”

Telegraph Hill Assembly attendee – “It was all very good as usual.”

Evelyn Assembly attendee – “A really good turnout, with lots of passion.”

Forest Hill Assembly attendee – “The Forest Hill Assembly is an engaging thing that does great work, keep it up.”

Bellingham Assembly attendee – “We didn’t get funded so other groups chipped in to help us, I was touched.”

Rushey Green Assembly attendee – “A really informative meeting.”

Downham Assembly attendee – “I had no idea what to expect, but what really struck me was how friendly it all was.”

4.7 Other Developments

During the course of the last year, Local Assemblies have worked with partners across the borough through a number of borough-wide initiatives. The Assemblies have provided a local forum in order to obtain local resident feedback, views and suggestions.

Sugar Smart

As part of Lewisham’s Sugar Smart campaign to tackle the growing incidence of and concern about obesity, in order to engage local residents and community organisations, a number of presentations have taken place at Assembly meetings, stimulating lively discussions on ways of implementing the national Sugar Smart strategy locally. This includes asking community organisations to sign up to the campaign, as well as working with local groups and businesses to encourage the provision of readily available healthy options, e.g. water and fruit in catering and food retail outlets.

Poverty Commission

During 2017, Local Assemblies hosted a number of discussions of the Lewisham Poverty Commission. This enabled the commissioners to seek and receive the views of local residents on the impact of poverty in the borough, as well as to receive ideas about initiatives the Council and partners might undertake to address incidents of poverty. The commissioners’ report in
autumn included a number of comments that had been received from Assembly meetings. The recommendations include the encouragement of Local Assemblies as the forum for developing partnerships and sharing information on local development and activities.

**London Borough of Culture**

In June 2017, the Mayor of London launched the Borough of Culture initiative which involved a competition amongst all the London boroughs to receive the designation of Borough of Culture for 2019 and 2020. Lewisham Council and partners’ strategy to develop a bid involved extensive consultation with local communities. Local Assemblies have played a central role in the shaping of the Lewisham bid, as well as disseminating information and galvanising local support through events and social media activities.

**Neighbourhood Community Development Partnerships (NCDPs)**

During the course of 2017, Community Connections and the Local Assemblies team have led the development of four NCDPs. The partnerships reflect the geography of the four clusters of GP practices across the borough and have worked to provide a network for community-based groups undertaking preventative and wellbeing focused work in their respective areas. During the course of the year, the networks have each met on at least three occasions and have worked to share information on their service delivery and develop a number of new initiatives to better address the need of residents. The network will continue meeting in 2018 and amongst the initiatives being taken forward are a project to recruit, train and support volunteers and the development of more user-friendly service directories for GPs and local residents.

**Assembly Guidance**

This was updated during the course of the year following feedback from members.

5. **Considerations for the future direction of Local Assemblies**

The present Assembly Programme has been in operation for 10 years and a number of lessons can be drawn from its operation. These include:

- They are an effective way for Ward Councillors to engage with local communities;
- They provide an opportunity for active engagement on community-wide issues;
- There are still groups that are not attracted to attending formal Assembly meetings, e.g. young people and people with caring responsibilities

In receiving this report, the committee is asked to consider the following in developing the Assembly programme for the future:

- How Local Assemblies can further develop the use of social media especially around promoting meetings to young people.
- How Local Assemblies can continue to engage with communities outside of meetings and maintain a strong and pro-active profile in challenging fiscal times
• How Local Assemblies can continue to act as a forum for engagement between the Council and its communities and play an integral role in influencing policy
• How Local Assemblies can provide a forum for local community organisations to better coordinate their services, working in conjunction with their local NCDP.