

SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE			
Report Title	Local Assemblies Review 2018-19		
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1. Purpose

This report provides an update on the work of the 18 Local Assemblies in Lewisham 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 2018-19 represents the eleventh full year of the Local Assembly programme. Average attendance at Assembly meetings for the full 2017-18 year was 151 compared to 163 the previous year. This figure includes community events held by many assemblies, which attract a larger turnout. If community events are not included, the average attendance for formal Assembly meetings is 82, as at the end of February 2019. It should be noted, though, that we have seen some very large formal Assembly meetings including 170 attendees at Catford South and 134 attendees at Grove Park.

Information collated from Assembly Feedback forms indicates that 29.1% of attendees are attending a ward assembly for the first time and that 85% of attendees will attend a further assembly meeting with 14% responding as maybe.

- 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 the last event taking place in 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 the subjects covered at October's event included the Local Democracy Review, the Local Plan and Lewisham's Transport Strategy.

- 4.4 Local Assemblies have acted as a catalyst for some key areas of community development. In some cases, Assemblies have used Assembly funds as a way of pump priming activities. In many cases, the Assembly has also provided a network for bringing communities of interest together to develop activities to address local priorities. The case studies provided below demonstrate the wide range of initiatives that have been developed – some of which are very locally specific but some have wider applications in other parts of the borough. Many of the case studies demonstrate innovation achieved through partnership working.

Telegraph Hill Assembly, Honor Oak Estate Steering Group - In 2018 a steering group for The Honor Oak Estate was established in response to community concerns around safety following gun & knife incidents on the estate. The meetings are Chaired by a Councillor & partners include community teams from both the social landlords, the TRA, the community centre steering group, Youth First, the Head Teacher of Turnham School, the community garden & Ward Assembly Development Officer. This group

identifies projects that can be undertaken by the group & its various partners. They also call on specialist support such as organisations who address youth violence. This joined up approach allows a quick response to any issues that are identified by the community.

One such project was led by the TRA who held a Windrush Compensation Surgery with Home Office which was held prior to their AGM. The Assembly led the Twitter campaign & around 50 people attended. This was reported at the Independent Committee looking into the Government's handling of Windrush & is now being called the 'Honor Oak Model', cited as best practice on how Councils can support their communities by the Home Office.

New Cross Assembly, Reaching out into the Estates - A pop-up Assembly event was held on the Crossfields Estate so that the Assembly could engage with parents & children who were coming home from school. The event was organised in partnership with Lewisham Homes and the Albany's Gardening project, with each partner providing activities for the children. This gave the opportunity to carry out consultation on a mural (generating ideas for the design), together with interest in community gardening and estate improvements together with any specific issues and what activities young people wanted. Young people were asked whether they used the Richard McVicar Adventure Playground. Whilst some did, many children did not use it as it was seen as being too far (even though most of the children did go to Deptford Park which was almost twice the distance). To combat this they were able to allocate Tideway funding to a walking bus service from Tidemill Academy and St Joseph's School which will start in Spring 2019. More pop-ups will be planned for 2019.

Evelyn Assembly, Tackling Food Poverty – This is one of the main objectives in Evelyn Ward with 3 of its 10 Local Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the bottom 20% against the Income deprivation Affecting Children Index and a further 6 LSOAs in the bottom 10% which one area, ranked 279th is in the bottom 1% in the country.

Deptford Play Club is an award winning, volunteer led project which is leading on Sugar Smart & healthy eating agendas They provided food for the autumn Assembly event, at which the children took part in forest school activities and planted as part of the Evelyn 200 project . This was to celebrate the 10th anniversary of services. The community and the Assembly have also been working with Lewisham Homes on the People's Supermarket in two community centres. This provides members with a range of healthy food for a small membership fee each week (average savings in similar projects are circa £37 per week). The Assembly has funded the volunteer training programme and S106 funding has ensured that the IT systems and Wi-Fi improvements are undertaken to support the project which will run from Evelyn & 2,000 Community Action Centres. Lewisham Homes will also be providing advice and employment services during opening hours.

Sydenham Assembly, Fun Palaces - In March 2018, Sydenham Assembly took the decision to support a Fun Palace the following autumn, as a way of bringing the whole community together, create a sense of pride in Sydenham, reach out to people who may be isolated and may not engage with Assemblies, and increase people's confidence and engagement with arts and science in the broadest sense.

The Fun Palaces were a resounding example of community action, with 98 Fun Palace "Makers" (the people who pitch in to make it all happen) across Sydenham, of which 47 were volunteers. The Fun Palaces took place at four very different community venues, each opened up free of charge for the weekend, and were attended by over 500 people.

Chair of Sydenham Assembly, Councillor Liam Curran said: “The Assembly voted to try our first-ever Fun Palace and it was a resounding success. It’s a great event that helps to build community spirit, enables people to learn more about their neighbours and their neighbourhood and can spark new social action and activities in the area.”

All sections of the community rose to the challenge including young people, the police, beekeepers, artists, singers, dancers, gardeners, cooks, photographers, piano players and many more besides.

The Maker teams were very inclusive including people aged under 18, over 65, disabled people and people from BME backgrounds. Maker teams all met new people and made connections, with several plans emerging for more partnership working in future. The community were so enthused by the Fun Palaces experiment that a steering group has formed to plan the next one, with several funding bids in to the Festival of Creative Ageing for age-related Fun Palace projects.

Growing out of the Fun Palaces, James Ross from Hunter Youth Support, a local Sydenham community group that works to prevent youth and gang violence and grew out of the tragic death of a young man in Sydenham 5 years ago, is now partnering with local arts company Spontaneous Productions to deliver a project for young people in Sydenham Ward affected by violence and youth crime to tell their stories through theatre. This exciting community development will give the young people an opportunity to be involved in workshopping ideas and working with professional actors to present a show which will be performed free at the TNG youth centre as well as at a ticketed event at the Sydenham Centre.

Perry Vale Assembly, Engaging with hard to reach communities at Lark in the Park - Perry Vale’s annual free community festival has grown significantly from being attended by around 500 people in 2015 to 1500 in 2018. This has been achieved through reaching out to wider community including local businesses and “harder to reach” community such as newly-arrived refugee groups, and partnering with local arts organisation Sydenham Arts who worked with a variety of schools and community groups to deliver a music and performance element to the festival.

The Development Officer worked with Syrian refugees group Min Albi to enable them to take part in Lark in the Park and build their social enterprise providing employment for newly-settled Syrian refugees. A small amount of Cllrs Discretionary Funding was provided to pay Min Albi to provide lunches for the festival volunteers and police cadets. This gave the group sufficient guaranteed takings to enable them to bring a food stall to the event. A large group of refugees took part including families with young children. They enjoyed being at the event and meeting the community and felt valued by contributing to a festival. Their food was extremely popular resulting in them at least covering their costs and gaining sufficient confidence to move further forward with their social enterprise plans

Perry Vale Assembly Fund also supported Bloom Bakery which provides training for unemployed people. In return Bloom Bakery supplied cakes to local groups such as Carers Lewisham and local Assemblies, which enabled the unemployed trainees to feel valued for their contribution.

Brockley Assembly, supporting Luxmore Gardens - Friends of Luxmore Gardens (FoLG) is a constituted community group, formed in Autumn 2016, with the aim of bringing about much needed improvements to Brockley’s rather neglected local ‘pocket park.

In November 2016 FoLG were awarded a £1,000 Brockley Assembly grant which was used to carry out a comprehensive survey of park users to establish local priorities for improvement. The grant also provided funding for

community events in the park – the ‘Luxmore Gardens Party’ and an Easter Egg Hunt celebrated the park plus a series of nature-based activities and planting sessions were run to observe and enjoy nature in the park throughout the seasons.

Thanks to this initial funding FoLG had a strong base to successfully apply to the Mayor’s Greener City Fund which aims to increase access to green spaces and nature and encourage biodiversity in the capital. This grant was awarded in Dec 2018 and the ‘Love Luxmore’ project has seen FoLG transform the park, with thousands of new plants, a ‘bug hotel’, new seating and a layout overview which has seen many of the mature bushes and trees pruned and reshaped to create light and a sense of openness plus safe den areas for children to play in the bushes.

‘Play Luxmore’ is Friends of Luxmore Garden’s most recent success came in September 2018, when they secured £60k funding from the Veolia Trust to refurbish and reimagine the play area and create a wider range of play and leisure opportunities in the park that appeal to all ages. They have attained some match funding via a section 106 agreement from the development adjacent to the park, Sport England and they were successfully awarded £1,973 from the 2018/19 Brockley Assembly which were requirements to secure the Veolia Trust 60k.

The ‘Play Luxmore’ project aims to offer physical and natural play opportunities and encourage social interaction between different ages. The current play apparatus is suitable for children up to the age of approx. 7 years of age. The play area will be enhanced with new swings and a wooden climbing structure to suit a broad range of ages. Natural play and interaction with nature will be encouraged with a den area, a mud kitchen and other measures. A drinking water fountain will provide free water to park users. The icing on the cake will be the installation of a permanent table tennis table – this was one of the most popular items with all ages in their original survey.

Crofton Park Assembly, Supporting Community Groups – Over the past few years the partnership between the Local Assembly Development Officer and the Community Forum Development Officer has seen the formation of some significant community partnerships within the ward. New organisations such as Cinderella Line continue to be supported as they work towards improving the train service from Crofton Park. This year the assembly has supported the Crofton Park Community Association as they try to take on the management of the old Barclays Bank building and turn it into a community centre and small community premises such as Ewart Road Clubhouse have been supported financially as well as encouraged to hold assembly meetings.

Grove Park Assembly and Job Fair – In partnership with ChART (Chinbrook Action Residents Team), this took place at Coopers Lane School with the assembly meeting following on from the Job Fair. Nearly 150 attended the event with many staying for the whole duration. The Job Fair consisted of numerous local organisations and employers talking about opportunities and training as well as tackling money issues and healthy eating. The assembly itself ran a dementia awareness exercise which was very well received. Overall the whole event was a huge success and a further joint event will take place in the future.

Whitefoot and Downham Assembly, ‘Fix My Street’ - To counter the prolific fly-tipping in the ward, attendees have been asked to bring along their Smartphone to the assembly. They have then been shown how to download and use the ‘Fix My Street’ app as well as other council services.

Bellingham Assembly, Bellingham Together – Following the tragic fatal stabbing of Jai Hughes outside Morleys in Bellingham, the Bellingham Assembly supported the police with the Bellingham Together event held at Athelney School. The event was fully supported by the local community who attended in droves despite the cold weather. Ultimately, the message was clear and the Bellingham community came together on a cold Saturday afternoon to demonstrate its support for Jai and for the community as a whole. The Bellingham Interagency Meeting continues to be supported by all the local organisations and has now been running for nearly 10 years. Meeting bi-monthly and linked closely to the assembly, the Interagency along with the assembly acts a conduit so that events such as Bellingham Together can be organised with relative ease.

Lee Green Assembly, a conduit for change - Working with residents the Lee Green Assembly appointed a working group to work with Council officers to look specifically at measures to reduce rat running and commuter parking during peak times. The demand for traffic to be removed from local streets has increased dramatically as a result of heightened concerns about air quality, expectations linked to the new 20mph and drivers avoiding traffic on the A20. A traffic survey conducted by a local group LeeLive provided a better understanding of the depth of the problem and helped informed discussion around looking for possible solutions. As a result of the advanced work conducted by the Assembly around these issues, Lee Green was selected as one of the pilot areas for the new Transport Strategy programme 'Healthy Neighbourhoods Plan'. This plan will promote increasing walking, cycling and public transport use, reducing traffic and improving air quality at the heart programme. Lewisham transport division is also planning to consult residents in April 2019 on the introduction of CPZ in areas currently not covered by the scheme.

Ladywell Assembly, better streets - In spring 2018 Brockley Better Streets began building a network of residents from both Ladywell and Brockley wards who wish to work together to help make their roads safer and better, creating a "Healthier Streets Approach". Brockley Better Streets brought together the whole community, including people from all ages and backgrounds, to participate. The scheme attracted a network of volunteer street coordinators who reached out locally to their neighbours with the aim of making the streets they live in healthier, safer and used more by a more diverse range of people and businesses, and ultimately thrive. The Ladywell Assembly part funded a street tool kit used in facilitating the initial planning of the scheme. A series of workshops was used to consider options for street changes.

Catford South, the Family Friendly Assembly - The demographics of people living in the area are changing rapidly. We now have many more families with younger children living in the ward.

The assembly has worked hard to engage this group by making the assembly meetings accessible for families. This has been by putting on craft activities or sports activities during meetings. It was also agreed by the Coordinating Group to drop the lower age limit for voting as it was felt it was crucial to try and engage the children in civic responsibility at the earliest age.

At the last voting meeting children were proud to give in their ballot papers, and it was ensured that that they were told that by coming along and voting they were making a real difference to their area.

The assembly will be working hard in the next year to engage more directly with teens and young adults to ensure that their voices are heard.

4.5 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.

Clean Air

Lewisham has been awarded Cleaner Air Borough (CAB) accreditation and Local Assemblies are currently being used to inform attendees about Air Quality Monitoring in Lewisham, the Ultra Low Emission Zone, actions to tackle air pollution and invite people to sign the clean air pledge.

Mayor's Questions

Following local elections in May 2018, a programme to enable the new Mayor to visit each Assembly was put in place, enabling residents to put questions directly to the Mayor. This proved to be very popular, allowing residents to raise a wide range of locally specific as well as broader questions regarding the work of the Council. Feedback from those attending Assemblies suggests that these events have been welcomed by residents, who have, on rare occasions, also used them to express disagreement with Council policy.

Local Democracy Review

Local Assemblies hosted a number of discussions relating to the review enabling members to seek the views of local residents as well as to receive ideas about initiatives the Council and partners might undertake to ensure that our community is even more engaged and has greater knowledge regarding how it can affect change.

Neighbourhood Community Development Partnerships (NCDPs)

The last year saw the second year's operation of the NCDPs in the four neighbourhood areas. The development of the partnerships has resulted in a number of well-being based organisations becoming more involved in the work of the Assemblies, as well as working in partnership with organisations which traditionally only work through Local Assemblies.

- 4.6 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

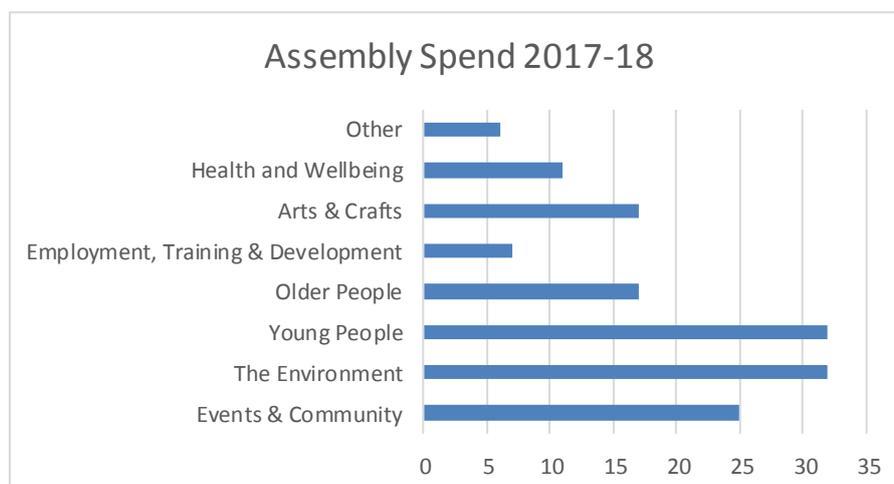
increased number of applications but requires the coordinating group to carefully sift and analyse applications to ensure they represent value for money, are robust / deliverable, benefit the ward and are not duplicating existing provision. This will mean that some applications are rejected upon application and others have been extensively worked upon and improved before going to the assembly.

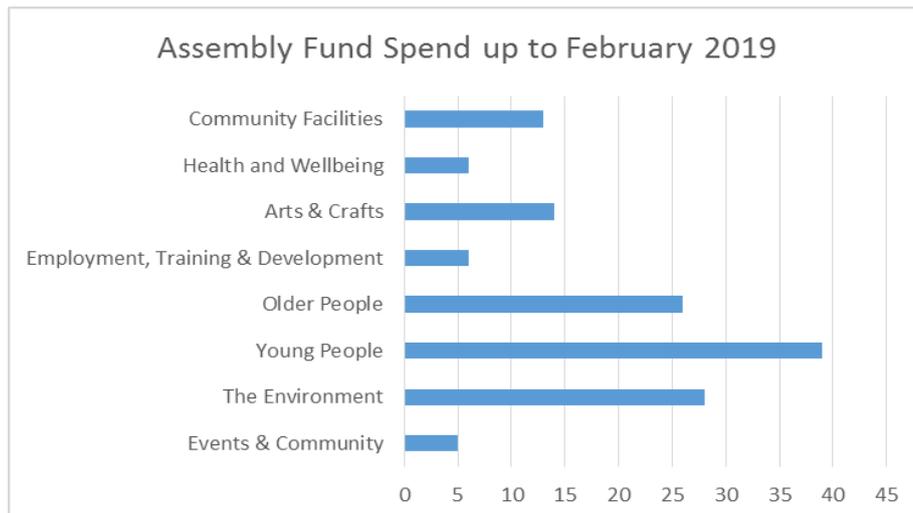
An increasing number of Assemblies use the marketplace approach to enable funding applicants to engage with Assembly participants. The marketplace allows for a dialogue to take place between residents and potential projects, followed by a voting process. This approach further increases resident engagement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

4.7 This section provides an analysis of the use of Assembly funds.

A total of 188 projects were funded in 2017/18. Of these, the highest award was for £8,060 in Lewisham Central ward for a project titled Greening Lewisham which is all about renewing public spaces within the town centre. In 2018/19 (as at the end of February 2019) 171 projects have benefitted from Assembly Funding. Of these, the highest figure awarded is £5,395 towards the community hub in Lee Green ward.





This year we are seeing a much greater variety of projects which benefit different areas particularly around supporting existing and new community facilities.

- 4.8 In 2019/20 due to the over pressure on the Council's budget due to Central Government cuts the Assemblies are to lose £12,500 of their funding with just the Councillors' discretionary fund remaining. In the absence of other developments this would have the potential to significantly change the nature of the Assemblies and reduce the appeal to some who attend.

This budget cut may also present opportunities as officers occasionally received feedback that some Assembly attendees find it frustrating that so much time is take up with allocating funding leaving less opportunity for community led action or discussion of local issues.

However, the Assemblies are likely to continue having a critical role in funding prioritisation and allocation as one of the main avenues for public consultation on Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy.

4.9 Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL)

The community infrastructure levy (CIL) is a charge that has been collected by Lewisham Council since April 2015 and is due when development in the borough meets certain requirements. These requirements are outlined in the CIL regulations 2010 and through its subsequent amendments. It is charged on all developments that add one or more new dwellings or more than 100sqm of floor space. CIL is charged at a rate per square metre and varies according to land use and location. There are currently 2 CIL charging areas in Lewisham that span the entire borough split between the north of the borough and the south.

Neighbourhood CIL (NCIL) is a proportion of this fund which can be allocated locally and it is currently being considered whether the Local Assembly structure be used as the neighbourhoods for the purposes for CIL. This aligns with the government's guidance to use existing community consultation and engagement processes, and enables the Council to build on the existing competencies, local capacities, local assemblies process and the political representation that exists through the elected members.

This proposal is currently being consulted upon with elected members and officers will update the Committee as this policy develops.

5. Considerations for the future direction of Local Assemblies

The present Assembly Programme has been in operation for 11 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 including targeted Facebook campaigns and Twitter with a coordinated approach and training for officers with clear guidelines.
- How local Assemblies can make best use of the opportunities provided by the introduction of a local approach to the allocation of NCIL
- 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 NCDP.
- That the findings and recommendations of the extensive Democracy Review, currently being led by the Council, will provide an opportunity for a refocus of the work of Local Assemblies.

A key issue for Local Assemblies in the coming year will be to continue to work with local communities and support initiatives without access to Assembly funds at the previous level.