



## Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee

### Local Assemblies Review 2019-20

**Date:** 4 March 2020

**Key decision:** No

**Class:** Part 1

**Ward(s) affected:** All

**Contributors:** Director of Cultural and Community Development

### Outline and recommendations

This report provides an update on the work of the 18 Local Assemblies in Lewisham, with particular emphasis on work undertaken by Local Assemblies following the introduction of the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL).

It is recommended that the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee notes the following:

- Work undertaken by individual Local Assemblies which has wider implications for others in the borough;
- The role of Local Assemblies in the administration and distribution of NCIL; and
- The achievements of the last year which will inform the future development of the Local Assemblies programme.

## Timeline of engagement and decision-making

This report relates to a number of priorities from the Council's Corporate Strategy for 2018-22. Local Assemblies continue to contribute to the Corporate Strategy, having been operational for 12 years, following a recommendation for their establishment in the Mayor's Commission report on "Empowering Communities and Neighbourhoods" published in 2007.

In the NCIL Strategy agreed by Mayor and Cabinet on 5 June 2019, Local Assemblies were allocated a key role in agreeing the use of NCIL funding.

### 1. Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the work of the 18 Local Assemblies in Lewisham, with particular emphasis on work undertaken by Local Assemblies following the introduction of the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL).

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee notes the following:
  - Work undertaken by individual Local Assemblies which has wider implications for others in the borough;
  - The role of Local Assemblies in the administration and distribution of NCIL; and
  - The achievements of the last year which will inform the future development of the Local Assemblies programme.
  - The proposed review of Local Assemblies

### 3. Policy Context

- 3.1. The contents of this report are consistent with the Council's policy framework. They support the priorities set out in the Corporate Strategy 2018-22, specifically:
  - Open Lewisham
  - Making Lewisham Greener
  - Building Safer Communities

### 4. Background

- 4.1. 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.
- 4.2. Prior to the Act, in May 2007, the Mayor's Commission on Empowering Communities

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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.

- 4.3. 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.
- 4.4. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations 2010 enable local authorities to charge on new developments which meet certain criteria. Lewisham Council has collected the Levy in appropriate cases since April 2015.
- 4.5. Neighbourhood CIL (NCIL) is a proportion of this fund which can be allocated locally. The Mayor and Cabinet's NCIL Strategy agreed in June 2019 identified the Local Assembly neighbourhoods structure as the appropriate structure for the purposes for NCIL. This aligns with the government's guidance to use existing community consultation and engagement processes, and enables the Council to build on existing competencies, local capacities, the Local Assemblies process and the political representation that exists through elected members.

## 5. Activities of Ward Assemblies during 2019-20

- 5.1. During 2019-20, Local Assemblies have continued to develop their wide-ranging engagement with local communities, with 41 meetings taking place, engaging over 6000 people. 2019-20 was the first year in which Local Assemblies operated without the assistance of the Local Assembly Fund, with the exception of the Councillors' Discretionary Fund. In previous years, the Assembly Fund provided a key focus for Assemblies' engagement work, enabling Assemblies to provide funding to local organisations to address identified priorities. It is encouraging that, even without this fund, Assemblies have continued to play a central role in engaging local communities. Examples of initiatives supported by Local Assemblies include the following:

- 5.2. **Sydenham:** Sydenham Fun Palaces 5 and 6 October 2019

Sydenham Fun Palaces were enthusiastically taken up by the Sydenham community for the second year. Attracting over 850 people in all, the Fun Palaces ethos brought together members of the community to take an asset-based, inclusive approach to enjoying arts and sciences. Participative events included Old Time Music Hall, digital photography, genealogy, creating a community garden, wall climbing, jewellery and crafts making.

In its first year of operation, the Fun Palaces concept led to the establishment of a community-based initiative (the SAFE Project) bringing a local youth group together with a community theatre company to develop a "lived experience" theatrical piece about knife crime and gangs on local estates. This was presented at the TNG Youth Centre in May 2019, and seen by a very diverse, enthusiastic and engaged audience of around 150, who also participated in an interactive session after the performance. The partnership is now seeking funding to take this performance piece to wider audiences across the borough.

- 5.3. **Lewisham Central:** Lewisham Park Playground Project

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- 5.4. Lewisham Park Tenants and Residents Association has been supported by the Lewisham, Central Local Assembly in activity to raise funds to improve the local playground. The Association has conducted consultations with faith organisations, other residents and schools in the immediate area of Lewisham Park, where the playground is in dire need of upgrading to meet safety and accessibility requirements, and has submitted funding applications to Pocket Parks and the L&Q Placemaking Fund.
- 5.5. **Lewisham Central:** Hither Green Improvement Project
- Following a successful S106 bid in October 2018 by the local community and Lewisham Central Assembly, the Hither Green Improvement Project has achieved:
- The planting of 15 trees in partnership with Street Trees for Living, with a further ten to be planted in 2020/21;
  - Development of a new kitchen and toilet block, with improved disabled access for the community space; and
  - Ongoing development of a Traders Association in Hither Green to take forward shop improvements.
- 5.6. **Crofton Park:** In July 2019, Crofton Park Local Assembly featured an introduction to Fostering In Lewisham. Crofton Park remains the only ward assembly to have undertaken this activity, which was met with a great deal of interest and resulted in several people requesting further information, including previous fosterers considering fostering again.
- 5.7. **Grove Park:** In partnership with L&Q the Grove Park summer of 2019 Assembly took place at the WG Grace Community Centre. A whole day of activities catering for people of all ages was arranged and a barbecue took place outside of the centre.
- L&Q were consulting on improvements to the centre and running a community day in conjunction with the Assembly helped maximise interest and encourage new people to come along to the meeting.
- 5.8. **Brockley:** The local community was activated on 27 January 2020 to highlight concerns about air quality after the borough was subject to an air quality alert by Air monitoring company CERC several days earlier. An alert of this type means that people with asthma or other lung conditions are advised to stay indoors. The group is planning weekly 10 minute demonstrations at 9.00am at the same location and held the first follow up event on Friday 6 February.
- 5.9. **Whitefoot:** Local Assemblies have been working in local communities to take forward regeneration projects, including use of s.106 funding. For example, the Whitefoot Assembly provided a vehicle for consulting and action planning with the local community on expenditure of £41k of s106 funding generated by the Excalibur Estate regeneration project. Following the consultation, the funding was allocated to improving facilities at Forster memorial park, in partnership with the Park Friends group, including improvements to existing play provision and the installation of an outdoor gym, which is used by a wide cross-section of the local community.

## 6. NCIL

- 6.1. The NCIL Strategy agreed by Mayor and Cabinet in June 2019 recognised the key role that Local Assemblies play in identifying local priorities and distributing funds as part of the NCIL initiative.
- 6.2. The amount of Neighbourhood CIL collected since the implementation of the CIL regime in Lewisham from 2015/16 to 2017/18 is £1,393,099.
- 6.3. The NCIL Strategy agreed a formula for distributing funds on a ward basis. The key

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features of this are:

- 50% collected in ward retained by the ward
- 25% allocated by reference to ranking of wards by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation
- 25% allocated to a borough wide fund

6.4. The Strategy outlined a six stage process for agreeing NCIL initiatives:

- Stage 1: Ward based priority setting
- Stage 2: Open call for projects
- Stage 3: Evaluation of projects
- Stage 4: Develop project bank (bi-annual or annual process – Local Assembly to decide)
- Stage 5: Allocating delivery
- Stage 6: Monitoring, evaluation and annual reporting

6.5. Stage 1 was deemed to be critical in raising local awareness of NCIL and engaging with local communities. To aid this process, an online platform, Common Place, previously used by Team Catford and other Council departments, was implemented. The platform enabled residents in local wards to identify the priorities they deemed to be the most important in addressing the needs of their areas. It was supplemented by work undertaken with individuals in community organisations to offer alternative consultation tools to the online platform, ensuring that a fully inclusive approach was taken.

6.6. To date, over 18,000 individuals have accessed the platform, providing a range of comments and identifying priorities. The five most popular priorities in each ward are discussed by the ward's Assembly for confirmation and endorsement, with the Assembly adding an optional sixth priority of its own.

6.7. Eleven of the 18 wards have so far discussed the priorities identified on Common Place and through other local engagement activities, particularly aimed at groups that have been identified as being less likely to engage with an online platform. Amongst the priorities identified have been:

- Transport and streets
- Open green spaces
- Community facilities
- Air quality
- Community safety
- Children's services and youth activities
- Work with vulnerable people

6.8. The operation of Common Place has enabled a wider selection of individuals to contribute to the prioritisation than would have been the case if discussion had only taken place at an Assembly meeting. However, there have been some lessons to learn from the way in which the online platform has operated. These include a number of technical problems, including a lack of initial access to individuals' feedback on other contributors' comments. It has also been the case that individual comments do not always fit into the broad categories available, and many contributions cross over into a number of different categories.

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A further difficulty with the platform has been that individuals have made comments on areas such as highways, which are not necessarily eligible for funding under NCIL, resulting in the risk of raising expectations which cannot be met through NCIL.

- 6.9. Following the conclusion of all Stage 1 ward activities in late March 2020, there will be an open call for applications for funding based on the agreed ward priorities. Local organisations will be supported in the development of their projects by the Community Development Team to ensure that projects are effective. Following the submission and assessment of applications, local residents will have a further opportunity to comment on proposed projects and to agree these at ward Assemblies in the autumn.

## **7. Review of Assemblies**

- 7.1. The Local Democracy Review undertaken in 2018-19 identified the need to review and improve the Local Assemblies, to ensure better representation of the ward population and more participatory engagement with communities.

- 7.2. The Local Assembly process provides the critical infrastructure for distribution of NCIL funds and will therefore operate within its current structure till proposals for funding are ratified. This period offers an opportunity to review the Assemblies. Working with colleagues in policy, a plan for review will be drawn up, to include:

- Reviewing the purpose and role of local assemblies in the context of other engagement work undertaken by the Council
- Better understanding of each ward, its demographics and infrastructure, to address the issues of representation and take a more bespoke approach to the local assembly
- Identifying community development needs with specific under-represented communities in each ward and programming the work of the team to undertake outreach and development
- Identifying different ways to engage communities including the use of social media
- Improving communication about assembly meetings
- Reviewing the content and format of discussions to ensure they are relevant and interesting to all communities and offer more opportunities for participation and co-production

- 7.3 Targeted engagement with specific communities is being supported by the team through initiatives such as the BAME network being developed to support the Health and Wellbeing Board priorities and the Insight work currently being commissioned by Public Health into Obesity and the experience of BAME communities. The review will consider how these wider programmes of work might link to more local ward-based support for communities and whether the local assemblies can play a part in connecting local residents to these initiatives and enabling communities to shape the offer and support available.

## **8. Next Steps**

- 8.1. Review lessons learned from NCIL process for future community engagement activities.
- 8.2. Review lessons learnt from use of online platform as key part of consultative process.
- 8.3. Seek and analyse feedback from Local Assemblies and residents' comments on Common Place.

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- 8.4. Take forward the recommendations from the Democracy Review, particularly relating to Seldom Heard Voices, in the context of Assemblies.

## 9. Financial implications

- 9.1. There are no additional financial implications, other than those already committed to the delivery of the Assembly programme and NCIL.

## 10. Legal implications

- 10.1. There are no specific legal implications.

## 11. Equalities implications

- 11.1. An Equalities analysis was undertaken as part of the preparation of the Council's CIL Charging Schedule. In accordance with the Equalities Act 2010, the analysis considered the potential impact of the Charging Schedule on those groups identified in the Act as having protected characteristics. The Strategy identified that the CIL mechanism is intended to raise money to fund infrastructure that will contribute to sustainable development in the borough. In this sense the Neighbourhood CIL Strategy should have an overall positive impact on the various equalities groups.

## 12. Climate change and environmental implications

- 12.1. A number of priorities identified by wards relate to environmental improvements.

## 13. Crime and disorder implications

- 13.1. There are no specific crime and disorder implications to this report. It is anticipated that a number of projects will foster good relations and promote community cohesion.

## 14. Health and wellbeing implications

- 14.1. There are no specific health and wellbeing implications to this report.

## 15. Background papers

- 15.1. Community Infrastructure Levy: Neighbourhood CIL Strategy. Mayor and Cabinet, 5 June 2019 - <http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=139&MIId=5479&Ver=4>
- 15.2. NCIL Grove Park Workshop CF Presentation

## 16. Glossary

Term	Definition
Ward/Local Assembly	Ward based mechanism through which local residents are able to meet and comment on local issues and the work of Lewisham Council

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Term	Definition
NCIL	Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy established under the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations 2010 and subsequent amendments, enabling the Council to make a charge against new developments in local areas

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