



Report to: Cabinet
Date: 7 August 2008
Subject: Townships
Report of: Select Committee 1
Contact officer: James Winterbottom 01942827473

Purpose / summary: To report the findings of Select Committee 1 investigations into Townships and propose a set of recommendations for improvement

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended:

Recommendation / decision: That Cabinet support the recommendations

Key Decision: This report does not involve a key decision. The decision made as a result of this report will be published within **48 hours** and cannot be actioned until **seven working days** have elapsed

Risks / Implications:

Financial:
Staffing:
Policy:
Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?
Wards affected:

Property Implications – Does the proposal involve a reduction, addition or change to the Council’s asset base or its occupation?

No

If yes, have the property implications been agreed with the Corporate Property Officer?

Does this proposal have significant implications for the Council and the local population?

A diversity impact assessment is not necessary at this stage, however, equality and diversity implications have been considered when producing this report.

Does this proposal involve a new policy or procedure or significant changes to an existing policy or procedure?

A diversity impact assessment is not necessary at this stage, however, equality and diversity implications have been considered when producing this report.

Has the Service Director - Borough Solicitor confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution? **Yes / No ***

Has the Service Director - Corporate Services confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? **Yes / No ***

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? **Yes / No ***

* delete which applicable

For Cabinet reports only :

Categorisation of the report:	x
Discussion leading to a decision	
Monitoring	
Sharing for corporate understanding	

	x
Discussion	
Decision	
Information	

Tracking/Process:

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
	16 June 2008		

There are no Background Papers to this Report within the meaning of Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Proper Officer Sue Johnson

Date 5 June 2008

Background:

This Select Committee investigation focussed on our Township Programme and was carried out at a time of increased national and local prominence for locality working, community engagement and empowerment. The Select Committee sought to understand the principles and requirements of changing national policy regarding empowerment and engagement and particular approaches being championed by central government, most notably Participatory Budgeting. We visited two areas of notable practice in the North East of England to learn about how they have approached community engagement and to understand their processes and techniques. The Select Committee used this learning to scrutinise our approaches in Wigan and develop recommendations to strengthen our approach and ensure the developing PACTS processes links effectively with the township approach.

Proposals:

There are seven core recommendations and three supporting recommendations made in the report.

Alternative options considered and reason for the recommended option:**Conclusions:**



Select Committee 1

Townships

Chair: Councillor J.S. Birch

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Executive Summary

This Select Committee investigation focussed on our Township Programme and was carried out at a time of increased national and local prominence for locality working, community engagement and empowerment. The Select Committee sought to understand the principles and requirements of changing national policy regarding empowerment and engagement and particular approaches being championed by central government, most notably Participatory Budgeting. We visited two areas of notable practice in the North East of England to learn about how they have approached community engagement and to understand their processes and techniques. The Select Committee used this learning to scrutinise our approaches in Wigan and develop recommendations to strengthen our approach and ensure the developing PACTS processes links effectively with the township approach.

Core recommendations:

1. The flexibility of the Township model is a strength and needs to be upheld in order that they can focus on the specific issues that matter to each area. However **we strongly recommend that each Township works to an agreed minimum standard.** We feel that representatives from across all Townships should draw up these minimum standards with input from all agencies across the partnership.
2. **Each Township Forum should have a senior officer of the Council or partner organisation affiliated to it.** This person should be seen as part of the Township Forum team and be a conduit between the forum, the council and partner organisations at a senior level. We feel that this role is vital in order to affect a cultural change in our local public services.
3. Another key recommendation towards achieving this cultural shift, to one where initial thoughts are about working **with** communities to develop sustainable improvements, is learning and development for all local agencies. We feel that

officer and elected member induction should include awareness of our neighbourhood approach with guidance on roles, responsibilities and working effectively with communities. Training and development for members of our communities should also be available in the key role they have to play. These development opportunities must be packaged well to ensure people aren't excluded because of transport, child care and other potential barriers.

4. It is clear that we need to create space for better sharing of information, good practice, training and development needs and issues from across all our neighbourhood's and townships. **We support the development of the LSP Forum, a space where joint chairs of the Township Forums can come together with members from other parts of the LSP family to share knowledge, learning and ideas.** This must also improve the flow of information from our townships to affect wider policy and strategy through improved communication (see Recommendation 7).
5. As the PACT process is developed it is critical that they link effectively with the Township Forums. The role of PACT co-ordinator will be critical to this and must be required to work closely with the Townships, to flag up issues captured through PACTS and provide feedback on activity. Township Forums should scrutinise the PACTS process in their area to ensure activity is completed to the required standard and to identify cross boundary themes that require longer term sustainable improvements.
6. We firmly believe that the purpose of the Township Forums should be re-stated. As the PACTS develop to deal with locality issues the strategic role of Township Forums in each area is critical. **Township Forums must act to identify sustainable opportunities, working closely with our communities, for the long term solution of issues across the township.** The Township Forums should be re-launched and packaged within our new approach to neighbourhood working. We feel that we need to rebuild trust with our communities.
7. The cycle of business at Township level must be recast in order to affect and influence mainstream budget and business planning processes. A good starting

point is to align the Township cycle, as part of the minimum standards work (Recommendation 1), with the council's integrated planning approach. This will enable priority issues at a local level to influence the strategic decisions taken about how we make best use of our resources. Appendix 1 outlines the cycle.

We have tried to carry out our investigation within our original scope covering the work of the Townships. However due to the complexity of this it was inevitable that we would find ourselves thinking about and challenging wider aspects of the council and its partners through the LSP. We have developed a small set of linked recommendations that we feel should be considered and tested in order to make a real success of our work in neighbourhoods through Townships, PACTS and other mechanisms.

- (a) We feel that the Township model should become part of the constitution in order to establish its clear and important role in the way we operate as an organisation and with our partners. But we think more work should be carried out with members of the Township Forums to establish the benefits and potential limitations of such an approach.
- (b) As the new LSP architecture emerges we feel that strong consideration should be given to the role of scrutiny within the thematic partnerships. Recasting our existing panels as scrutiny committees linked to each of the thematic partnerships would strengthen accountability of the partnerships and make it more efficient for Overview and Scrutiny to hold partner organisations to account for delivery against the Sustainable Community Strategy, LAA and Township plans and PACT activity. More thought would be needed as to the make-up of these committees to ensure an effective balance between knowledge and experience and the skills required to scrutinise.
- (c) We have given a lot of thought to community involvement, engagement and empowerment during this review. We feel that we should be doing more to work with our communities, to build capacity and engender a relationship of co-production. This should be an area for further investigation

Introduction

The general theme for this investigation was ‘Townships’; their role in improving customer focus and perception and how they fit into the forward plans of the authority. Before developing a Terms of Reference for the research, the Select Committee looked at the history of the Township Programme, what it had been set up to achieve, its original intent and lessons from evaluations of the programme. We also reflected on the wider policy context of community engagement and its key role; Strong and Prosperous Communities¹ and the subsequent Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill², Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities³ and An Action Plan for Community Empowerment⁴.

From this initial scoping work the Select Committee developed their Terms of Reference:

The focus for our review is to scrutinise the effectiveness of our approach to local engagement and participation through the Township programme. We have decided, through debate and initial research, to frame our investigation around a developing area of national policy; **Participatory Budgeting**.

This is an approach that is starting to emerge in many areas as a framework for how local Councils and Partnerships engage with communities in establishing local plans and priorities – and in giving local people a genuine sense of having a voice.

We think that by framing our investigation around this area we will be able to better explore our current position and to understand what might be the key areas for local improvement and development.

¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/152456>

² <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/153122>

³ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/550804>

⁴ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/actionplan>

We also think that a focus on participatory budgeting is an opportunity for members and officers to work alongside one another to explore new and emerging policy issues.

Objectives

1. To gain a full understanding of the notion of participatory budgeting including examples of good practice / development.
2. To compare our current approach to the **principles** required for effective participatory budgeting and community engagement and the good practice identified.
3. To identify improvements / future direction for local engagement and participation in Wigan through the Township Programme.

This was not a review of Participatory Budgeting (PB). But we wanted to use the emerging framework of PB as a model through which we could scrutinise the Township Programme.

Background and Methodology

In carrying out our review of Townships the Select Committee have been supported by colleagues from Chief Executive's Services, Environmental Services and Greater Manchester Police. We have also received information and help from community representatives. The Select Committee are especially grateful to Marion Andrews, Simon Dale, Sian Jay, Ian Harrison and Julie Ridgeway for their help with this investigation.

As the Select Committee were carrying out this piece of work there were a number of local and national developments that had or have the potential to significantly affect our approach to community engagement. We began the review with an assessment of the White Paper for Local Government ('Strong and Prosperous Communities') and we were acutely aware that we were carrying out our review in this area at a time of increased national focus. We felt that it was important to understand the national context and the potential impact on Wigan. As we started our investigation the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) published, 'An Action Plan for Community Empowerment' that set out to widen and deepen empowerment opportunities locally, support and enable people to take up empowerment opportunities and strengthen local representative democracy. **We need to respond to this agenda.**

Locally there have been discussions regarding the architecture of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) that could possibly affect the role of the Townships and any recommendations made by the Select Committee. Similarly the pilot activity for PACTS and proposed roll out across all parts of the borough will have an impact and so the Select Committee set out to learn more about these developments.

The Select Committee identified three key phases to this investigation:

- Learning – The approach of other areas to community engagement and involvement including those identified as good or emerging practice.

- Comparison – Using the learning gained from phase 1 to scrutinise our approaches and to look across townships for areas of good practice.
- Recommendations – Developing a set of focussed recommendations from our learning and comparison work.

Findings

Phase 1: Learning

Community engagement and empowerment and community leadership are high on the government's agenda and are key priorities for us as an organisation and in the outcomes we seek to achieve with our partners. The Local Government Act 2000 laid the foundations of this and the importance of this area has been strengthened and recognised since then; most notably in the white paper for Local Government 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' (2006) and 'An Action Plan for Community Empowerment' (2007).

During this time in Wigan we have made good progress in working with our communities. A range of approaches have been tested and implemented and this development continues today. The Township Programme was originally trialled in 1992 with part-time area coordinators. Through the use of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding in 2003 full time Township Managers were established to support the Township Forums. Each Township Forum adopted a detailed terms of reference and developed an action plan based on local priority issues linked to the achievement of the Community Plan. In April 2008 Township Officers, as part of the implementation plan from the review of our environmental services and the establishment of the Environmental Services Department, have transferred from Chief Executive's Department to the Neighbourhood's Division of Environmental Services. In 2008 we also established a pilot Partners and Communities Together (PACT) process.

The Select Committee sought to understand how others had tackled this emerging and increasingly important area, to learn about the wider agenda and then apply this learning to what has happened in Wigan. From our research we identified two local authorities, with differing approaches to this area, that we felt we could learn important lessons from for our investigation; Newcastle City Council and Easington District Council in the North East of England.

Newcastle City Council are similar to us in terms of population, demographics and industrial heritage. They have embarked on an ambitious participatory budgeting (PB) approach called 'Udecide'. In autumn 2007 the city council ran a PB event that attracted 200 people from local communities to listen to 33 project proposal pitches and vote to allocate £80,000 of public money (£70,000 NRF and £10,000 Safer Stronger Communities Fund). PB appears to be working in Newcastle and they are looking to move from the allocation of relatively small pots of grant funding to using the model to influence more considerable mainstream funding. As well as the benefits of giving people the opportunity to influence and be involved in decisions that affect their areas Newcastle point to wider community cohesion impacts of the scheme. These are however difficult to clearly evidence.

It has taken a significant amount of commitment and resource to establish an apparently successful PB scheme in Newcastle. Officers spent time building capacity in communities to ensure people had the skills and confidence to develop an idea and pitch it effectively. Those taking part were also given a training session on local government finance and budgeting. A key learning message from Newcastle's experience is that **PB is not a cost effective way of spending relatively small grants** over the long term. But as a process towards involving communities and giving them a real say over how funds are spent in their area it shows positive signs of being successful. A number of elected members in Newcastle are now putting their small area funds into the PB pot for their constituency areas and officers are confident that this will grow and start to influence mainstream spend as it proves itself as having a positive impact.

There are currently 22 PB pilots taking place in the UK. Communities Secretary Hazel Blears MP has expressed her ambition **for every local authority area to be carrying out some form of PB by 2012.**

As the select committee learned more about the principles of PB we discovered that we were in fact carrying out some PB type activity although this was on a rather ad-hoc basis as we don't have a policy towards implementing PB as part of 'the way we do things here'. But examples from the Trees Estate and Worsley Hall of 'Dragons Den' events for example, demonstrate that we have trialled PB type activity. But

lessons from Newcastle’s experience tell us that if such events are to be carried out effectively and capture the real value of community involvement and engagement there needs to be a significant commitment to the approach and the resources provided to support it. The national PB Unit helped us to further understand the principles of PB and how and where it is currently being used. It is clear that whilst the concept is in its infancy in the UK many of the principles have been used in wider community engagement and involvement work in recent years.

Easington District Council has taken a different approach to community engagement than Newcastle, and like us hasn’t formally taken a PB approach. Easington’s focus has very much been to get closer to communities, to understand what they want from the council and its partners and how they want to influence, be involved and engage with public service activity in their localities. The debate in Easington centred on a **representative, consultative** approach and a **participative, delivery** based approach.

Representative	Participative
Neighbourhood and other engagement activities rely on elected members, council and partner officers listening to local people and acting on their behalf	Neighbourhood and other engagement activities centre on local people making decisions and allocation / spending money

It seems sensible that the best way to approach this area will be influenced by many things locally and will depend on how local people want to actively engage in the process. Easington asked their communities and found that they really valued democratic representation and **wanted to be involved (91%) but wanted local councillors to make decisions** based on consultation and involvement opportunities. Easington have remodelled their approach and have developed a virtual community engagement team from across the organisation to build capacity and resource. This virtual team service a **menu of involvement opportunities** to support the different degrees to which people want to engage.

Menu

- **Shaping the vision for the district...**through the LSP
- **Shaping the neighbourhood...**through more local neighbourhood forums linked to police and other partners
- **Routine involvement in service design...**through customer services and drawing on citizen's panels
- **Council support for community led initiatives...**support for community led regeneration partnerships and residents groups and communities of interest
- **Democratic advocacy...**ward councillors, walkabouts, councillor calls for action, scrutiny role
- **Devolved service delivery...** zonal working, more devolution to parishes
- **Performance viewed through residents' eyes**

Phase 2: Comparing

The Select Committee used the learning from phase 1 to focus on our Township Programme and the impact of other developments such as PACTS and changes to the architecture of the LSP. We carried out face to face interviews with Township Managers and Co-ordinators and used the same base questions to gain the views of Township joint chairs in order to broaden our understanding of what works and areas for improvement. The following issues are key points raised by those working at the heart of the Township Forums:

- The Township Programme has made a significant difference to certain parts of the community.
- It works best when people are ready and willing to be involved and share their knowledge and experience.
- Forums have created positive thinking and positive action.
- They work when they produce visible results for the community to see.

- It takes time to get it right; different organisations bring different agenda's.
- Some partners are not fully engaged in the process with particular difficulty gaining regular commitment from the PCT.
- We need to be clearer on people's roles and what is expected of them / what they should offer; this applies to community members, elected members and officers.
- Officers need to present information in a way that makes sense, is relevant and can be understood – senior managers should take an active role.
- Politics can get in the way of progress.
- Townships should be the strategic hub for that area and should influence organisational and partnership wide plans and priorities including the LAA.
- Decisions are already made before they get discussed at the Forum – and nobody listens to what we have to say.
- We need to understand and influence the links to the developing PACTS.
- Focus tends to be on cleaner, greener, safer agenda; can be difficult to widen generally to other areas such as economy and health; but we have had some successes.
- Personalities play a big part in the success or otherwise of the programme.
- Amount of resource is a barrier to success. But we need to consider the best use of these resources.
- Townships should be about involvement and participation.
- We need to make sure we keep the people with the 'good ideas' and ensure that community involvement in 'getting things done' is maintained and developed.
- improves perception of council among local people
- Developments in many areas with extra community groups emerging and communities seeing a purpose in participating
- Residents now getting a broader understanding of pressures leading to specific council decisions.

It was clear from our discussions that no one Township Forum is the same and in many ways this a key part of their achievements as no one community is the same and big issues will differ across the borough. But there are some extremes of

experiences from the very positive to the very negative and this seems to be about people, personalities, support and so on. The Select Committee felt strongly that there should be a set of minimum standards that each Township Forum works to, but that these standards need to be developed in such a way that doesn't create identikit forums and gives enough space for individuality and focus on key local issues. A key concern for the Select Committee is the apparent lack of support for the Township Forums from the PCT and this needs to be considered in the development of standards; a charter that each partner including the community can sign up to outlining their responsibilities and commitment to the forums. There is obviously a lot of fantastic work going on in many of the Townships, real community involvement and engagement and some significant, visible results achieved in partnership. But the Select Committee felt that more needs to be done to create spaces for shared learning and discussion across the townships so that time and energy can be saved on developing solutions to problems that are replicated across the borough.

Recommendations

1. Each Township should work to an agreed minimum standard including terms of reference, charter, code of conduct and business cycle. Where these are in place they should be reviewed to ensure they are relevant and consistent.
2. Each Township Forum should have a senior officer of the Council or partner organisation affiliated to it.
4. Develop the LSP Forum, a space where joint chairs of the Township Forums can come together with members from other parts of the LSP family to share knowledge, learning and ideas.

PACTS

As the Select Committee were carrying out this investigation, the PACT process was being piloted, developed and evaluated. Members of the Select Committee felt that it was important to understand about this process and how it would link to and affect the work of the Township Programme. We interviewed officers of the council and Greater Manchester Police so that we could understand the process and how it

would link into the wider partnership approach and to pass on our initial thoughts from our investigation to help with this developing area.

Full details of the PACT process can be found at::

<http://www.wigan.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/105311E0-5531-440F-B953-6894DFC7C57A/0/07PACTreport.pdf>

Experiences of the PACTS process so far suggest that it is an effective vehicle for dealing with relatively low level problems in neighbourhoods even when these issues are complex and involve multiple agencies. Elected Members, in their role as community leaders, and with the experience and knowledge they have at local level will provide a crucial role to the PACTS process. It is clear that there is a critical role for Township Forums to scrutinise the PACTS process as well as informing and shaping the approach in each area as an area based strategic hub. The Township Forums need to influence wider policy and strategy across the partnership. Township action plans need to have more influence at the partnership level to ensure that collective issues from communities are identified in strategic discussions about use and direction of mainstream resources (such as LAA). Attendance, involvement and commitment of key agencies and members is critical to the success of the process.

The Select Committee felt that more could be done to harness the significant body of local people willing to get involved. A key element of PACTS will be capacity building in communities so that issues are dealt with together and skills developed so that involvement of local people can be grown where appropriate.

Recommendations:

5. As the PACT process is developed it is critical that they link effectively with the Township Forums. The role of PACT co-ordinator will be critical to this and must be required to work closely with the Townships, to flag up issues captured through PACTS and provide feedback on activity. **Township Forums should scrutinise the PACTS process in their area** to ensure activity is completed to the required standard and to identify cross boundary themes that require longer term sustainable improvements.

6. We firmly believe that the purpose of the Township Forums should be re-stated. As the PACTS develop to deal with locality issues the strategic role of Township Forums in each area is critical. **Township Forums must act to identify sustainable opportunities, working closely with our communities, for the long term solution of issues across the township.** The Township Forums should be re-launched and packaged within our new approach to neighbourhood working. We feel that we need to rebuild trust with our communities.

7. The cycle of business at Township level must be recast in order to affect and influence mainstream budget and business planning processes. A good starting point is to align the Township cycle, as part of the minimum standards work (Recommendation 1), with the council's integrated planning approach. This will enable priority issues at a local level to influence the strategic decisions taken about how we make best use of our resources. Appendix 2 outlines the cycle.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Following our investigation we are clear that we need to strengthen and continue to work closely with our communities in neighbourhoods and localities. Many people work tirelessly within their neighbourhoods to help create stronger communities and many have developed a close affinity with their local area. In agreeing our recommendations we were also conscious of the increasing national prominence of the neighbourhood, community empowerment, involvement and engagement agenda.

We have some challenging social and economic issues to deal with. Our citizens rightly demand excellent services available in a way that suits their different needs. As expectations increase we also have to deal with some significant demographic and economic changes and technological advancements. All of these things mean we have to organise ourselves differently to improve in terms of the quality of life experienced by our citizens, service quality and efficiency. We firmly believe that the platform established through the development of the Township Programme needs to be strengthened so that we can serve the needs of our communities and help them to work with us to create sustainable solutions to the issues that face us.

Core recommendations:

1. The flexibility of the Township model is a strength and needs to be upheld in order that they can focus on the specific issues that matter to each area. However **we strongly recommend that each Township works to an agreed minimum standard.** We feel that representatives from across all Townships should draw up these minimum standards with input from all agencies across the partnership.
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partner organisations at a senior level. We feel that this role is vital in order to affect a cultural change in our local public services.

3. Another key recommendation towards achieving this cultural shift, to one where initial thoughts are about working **with** communities to develop sustainable improvements, is learning and development for all local agencies. We feel that officer and elected member induction should include awareness of our neighbourhood approach with guidance on roles, responsibilities and working effectively with communities. Training and development for members of our communities should also be available in the key role they have to play. These development opportunities must be packaged well to ensure people aren't excluded because of transport, child care and other potential barriers.
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- (c) We have given a lot of thought to community involvement, engagement and empowerment during this review. We feel that we should be doing more to work with our communities, to build capacity and engender a relationship of co-production. This should be an area for further investigation

Appendix 1: Planning Cycle



