



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

**COUNCIL CABINET**  
**4 September 2007**

Report of the Community Commission

## **From Areas to Neighbourhoods**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

- 1.1 That the Council Cabinet considers the comments of the Community Commission and amends the Good Practice Guide accordingly to further strengthen the working arrangements of the Neighbourhood Forums and Boards.

### **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 2.1 Following a request from the Full Council, the Community Commission considered the arrangements for neighbourhood working at its 23 July meeting. Members welcomed the change from Area Panels to Neighbourhood Forums and Boards and raised a series of questions on how the arrangements will work in practice. The Commission also proposed the development of a Good Practice Guide to assist with the transition and enable minor changes to be made to the working practices without needing to amend the constitution every time.
- 2.2 The arrangements for the new process have now been developed and a Special Meeting of the Community Commission was held on 29 August to consider the Good Practice Guide and the proposed amendments to the Constitution. Since this is a major change from the existing process all elected members of the Council were invited to the meeting to give their views and comments.
- 2.3 The Commission considered the comments of all the elected members attending the special meeting. A total of 22 out of the 51 Councillors attended and two councillors sent in written questions who could not attend, 12 of whom spoke and their comments are reflected in the following recommendations:

#### **Budget and Funding**

1. The Commission supports the distribution of the Area Panel budget equally amongst all wards as this is the fairest method of dividing the Area Panel budget.
2. The Commission has concerns about the level of funding currently being made available to Boards and feels this is insufficient to address all their local priorities. The Commission recognises that neighbourhood working

is a new process which enables elected members to strengthen their leadership role and address a range of local issues. However, the level of resources available to each area can influence how quickly and effectively some of the local issues can be tackled. The Commission therefore anticipates more resources will be made available to Neighbourhood Forums in the future.

3. All Neighbourhood Boards should be required to develop criteria for their community budget which should reflect their local priorities. However, the Boards should be given the freedom and flexibility to decide how the budget should be spent within their respective neighbourhoods. Members felt the existing criteria was too restrictive and that, for example, religious organisations should be eligible to bid for funding providing they do not spend the money on promoting religious activities.
4. The Commission recommends details of the funding available to each ward in the current year be circulated to all Councillors as an addendum to the Cabinet report.

## **Membership**

5. The Commission feels the procedure for appointing resident members on to the Board is too onerous and bureaucratic and should be made simpler. It recognises the need to make the process open, transparent and accountable but feels requiring each nominee to be nominated by a minimum of ten residents from ten separate households is excessive. This is greater than for example the requirement to stand as a ward councillor. The guidance for candidates and agents published by the Electoral Commission requires nomination paper to be signed by 10 registered electors in the ward but does not specify the number of households.
6. The Good Practice Guidance is unclear about how resident members of the Board can be selected in the first year. It states that a selection of the nominated persons will be made by members of the Board. Since there is no Board to begin with for some wards, resident members cannot be selected. The Commission suggests that in the first year resident members be appointed by the Neighbourhood Forum.
7. The Commission supports setting a minimum requirement of 50% of resident and community representatives to live in the neighbourhood as this will ensure local accountability.
8. Section 9.3.1 lists partner organisations that can be Board members. The Commission suggests only the representatives of the partner organisations should be given a position on the Board and the word *officers* be deleted (9.3.1). And since the City Council is represented by the three councillors and it should also be removed from the list of partner organisations.
9. There is currently no set maximum number of people for each Board. The Commission believes that this could be made clearer and the numbers

could be set at a maximum of 20. These could include 3 ward members, 7 agency representatives and up to 10 local/community representatives. The Board could be allowed from time to time to co-opt individuals with specific expertise to assist them with their work as and when required.

## **Other Issues**

10. Some members felt there was confusion on the number of forums that could be held per ward and asked for greater clarity. The Commission suggests that the Council Cabinet should take into account whether there is administrative capacity to support more than one forum per ward.
11. Members felt that in their experience there had been occasions when relevant officers had not attended Area Panel meetings and consequently issues could not be progressed as quickly as they could have done. The Commission recommends that relevant officers and/or Council Cabinet member should be required to attend Board meetings when requested and that this requirement is referenced in the Good Practice Guide.
12. There was considerable debate on whether the Board meetings should be open to the public or held in private and there were strong arguments on both sides. The Commission suggests that this be left up to each Neighbourhood Forum to decide.
13. Tackling cross boundary issues such as parking and traffic congestion were raised by some members. The Commission believes these could be addressed by establishing sub groups between the neighbourhoods affected.
14. Members felt the scope of the forums should be broad and include all matters that affect residents and not be restricted to clean, safe and green issues nor Council centric.
15. Neighbourhood Forums are expected to produce local priorities. It is unlikely that all of these could be funded through the Community budget. The Commission recommends a robust mechanism to be established that enables Neighbourhood priorities to be fed up to the City Council and partners to ensure that Neighbourhood Priorities are reflected in partner budgets.
16. The Commission accept the recommendations for petitions.
17. The minimum number of meetings for Forums/Boards needs to be made clear in the guidance-it is not clear in the guidance reviewed by the Commission.
18. Neighbourhood Managers were mentioned at the meeting, this information should be circulated as an addendum to this report along with the budget information.

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<b>Background papers:</b>	From Areas to Neighbourhoods - 4 September Council Cabinet Report
<b>List of appendices:</b>	Appendix 1 Implications

## Appendix 1

### IMPLICATIONS

#### Financial

1. The Area Panel budget of £99,000 will be divided equally amongst and allocated to each of the Neighbourhood Boards.

#### Legal

2. None arising from this report

#### Personnel

3. None directly arising

#### Equalities Impact

4. Neighbourhood working will affect all residents in the city.

#### Corporate priorities

5. Neighbourhood working links to all of the Council priorities.