



## Area Panel Review Progress Report

### SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Area Panel 1 of the outcome of the Area Panel Review – stage 1. The Area and Neighbourhood Unit carried out the review between June 2005 and October 2005. Stage 1 of the review focused on identifying improvements to the current meeting process. The next stage will focus on the wider strategic role of the Area Panels and their potential to contribute to delivering neighbourhood working. |
- 1.2 This report summarises the short term and medium term changes that have been agreed as a result of the review and points to longer term strategic changes which could build on these.
- 1.3 The consultation process included a variety of methods:
  - **Celebration of Area Panels event 27 June 2005**  
100 residents provided ideas and views on ways to improve area panels.
  - **Area Panel Evaluation Forms**  
669 forms returned by residents between September 2003 and October 2005.
  - **Area Panel Agenda Order Evaluation Forms**  
55 residents responded to the new order in June 2005 round of meetings
  - **Questionnaires**  
Questionnaires distributed in July/August 2005 to 380 residents who have attended area panel meetings, all councillors, 25 Council officers and 26 partner officers who have attended area panel meetings. 160 residents, 21 Councillors and 15 officers returned surveys.
  - **Focus groups**  
Two resident focus groups were run in October 2005 for residents who have attended area panel meetings.
  - **Members Seminar**  
32 councillors attended a seminar about options to tackle key issues raised in the review.
- 1.4 The key issues and ideas for change raised during the consultation period were:
  1. How meetings are chaired
  2. Distribution of agenda papers
  3. Changing the agenda order
  4. Position of the minutes on the agenda
  5. Improving the process for petitions
  6. Improving Public Question Time
  7. Improving the way responses are reported back - Community Updates
  8. Improving presentations and reports
  9. Improving the area panel funding criteria

1.5 The Area Panel Review Steering Group and the Area and Neighbourhood Programme Board considered the feedback from residents, officers and Councillors on each of these issues and have agreed the introduction of short term and medium term improvements.

1.6 **Short term Improvements - to introduce in January 2006**

- a. Reintroduce free distribution of agenda papers to residents who have attended the last two area panel meetings
- b. Use the numbered card system at all public question times
- c. Put the updates report before public question time
- d. Amend the updates report into the standard report format, provide less detailed information and include an outstanding issues list. Provide details of the full history for each community issue in the Council Management Information System - CMIS
- e. Determine an agenda order with updates before question time and minutes at the start
- f. Allow presentations only on the request of residents, area panel or the chair

1.7 **Medium term improvements - to introduce in the new municipal year 2006/7**

- a. Link Chief Officers to each Area Panel including attending pre-meetings and holding post meetings sessions
- b. Introduce a Chair's report to each meeting
- c. Review the existing Area Panels terms of reference
- d. Amend the Council constitution to remove the Area Panel Good Practice Guide except for protocols 8 – Area panel chairs, 9 – Councillors' roles and responsibilities and 13 – Councillors and officers attending area panels as residents
- e. Review and update the Area Panel Good Practice Guide
- f. Review and introduce new petitions procedure to clarify responsibilities
- g. Review and introduce new funding criteria

1.8 The next stage of the review process will look at how the more strategic requirements can be met. The focus of the review will be to identify ways of freeing up time of officers who respond to questions and petitions, to build in resources for more strategic planning meetings as well as the panels themselves. Crucial areas such as responding to petitions, administration of area panel grants, and the role of Cabinet and scrutiny in addressing persistent or major issues, need to be addressed.

In addition, the next stage will consider the potential of area panels to contribute to delivering neighbourhood working and whether further decision making can be devolved to the panels.

**PROPOSED ACTION**

2.1 To note the agreed short term and medium term changes to the operation of Area Panels as a result of the Area panel review.

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<b>Background papers:</b>	Area Panel Review 2005 report to Area Panels June 2005
<b>List of appendices:</b>	None