



REVITALISING NEIGHBOURHOODS PROJECT

FINDINGS OF CONSULTATION ON NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS

August 2002

Introduction

The purpose of the consultation

From the beginning of June to the end of July 2002 the Council consulted people over the proposal to set up ten neighbourhood forums across the whole of the city, as part of its Revitalising Neighbourhood project.

The consultation had two objectives:

- to give us people's views to help us write Guidance for Neighbourhood Forums over the autumn; and
- to help raise awareness about the proposal to develop the forums themselves.

The groups of people we wanted to hear from were partners, voluntary and community groups, residents, Councillors, Council employees and Council unions.

The focus of the consultation was a consultation paper called 'Setting up Neighbourhood Forums in Leicester' and a leaflet called 'Let's Get Together'.

The purpose of this report is to provide a broad overview of the outcomes of that consultation.

Using the consultation

Many of the issues that people raised in the consultation cannot be reproduced here, as this report can only give a flavour of some of the key issues and a general summary of respondents answers to the 20 questions.

But it is important to say that all of the issues and comments that people put forward to will be referred to and used, both in writing the guidance, and in working with partners and in areas of the city to set up the forums themselves.

Thank you

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who took time to speak or write to us in response to the consultation. Copies of this report will be sent to all those who responded.

Method of Consultation

The consultation paper contained a detailed discussion of the issues involved in developing forums. The issues in the paper reflected the issues that had been raised in previous discussions and consultation over the idea of developing forums.

The paper included 20 specific questions about the design of forums. In addition, a plain language leaflet called 'Let's Get Together' was produced. The leaflet was made available in other languages and formats, and it asked one question: 'Please tell us what you would like to see done to make these forums as effective as possible'.

The consultation paper was mailed to over 500 partners in the city and the leaflet was mailed to nearly 800 voluntary and community groups. Information about which organisations were written to is available from the Revitalising Neighbourhoods Team. The mailshots included all schools and other educational establishments, and chairs of governors. Some organisations received both the consultation paper and the leaflet where it was felt that they could help with getting the leaflet to more people.

Copies of the leaflets were also placed in a wide range of Council reception points. Many people and organisations requested further copies of the consultation paper or the leaflet.

The consultation paper and the leaflet were also placed on the Council's internet and intranet sites.

Respondents were given a choice of responding by freepost, phone, or email.

An article (with similar copy to the leaflet) was published in the July edition of Link magazine, and contact with the local media elicited an article in the Leicester Mercury and an interview on BBC Radio Leicester.

On 25th April a Community Conference organised by Voluntary Action Leicester (VAL) and the Health Action Zone discussed neighbourhood forums and a further, similar conference on the 11th July also discussed forums, including proposed boundaries. On 14th June the VAL Umbrella Group discussed the Council's response to the issues raised at the 11th June conference. The Umbrella Group also discussed the forums and agreed that their general feeling was to support the proposed boundaries.

The consultation paper was presented to the Leicester Partnership on 24th July, and on 2nd August the partnership also discussed and supported the proposed boundaries.

In addition, officers from the Revitalising Neighbourhoods team have discussed forums with officers from Leicestershire Constabulary, the Chief Executives of the two Primary Care Trusts, the Chief Executive of Connexions, the Chief Executive of Braunstone Community Association, the Director of Voluntary Action Leicester, the City Centre Manager and Councillor Westley (Cabinet Lead for City Centre) and officers involved in regeneration schemes eg. SRB Programme Managers.

These meetings will also inform the production of the guidelines and the development of the forums in general.

In the City Council itself, all Councillors were written to for their views. A leaflet was sent out to all teams using the 'In Contact' mailing list and members of the Senior Managers' Forum were asked to consult with their staff and respond. The paper was presented to a meeting of the Revitalising Neighbourhoods Joint Trades Unions Group.

There is a list of respondents at the end of this report.

Findings

General issues

Many of the people responding to the consultation made general comments about the forum proposals as well as or instead of responding to the twenty questions.

These comments were very diverse in terms of the issues they covered or the opinions given on the same issues, so it is only possible to pick out the few that might be grouped into themes here.

However, as mentioned in the introduction to this report, all of the comments have been considered in the process of drawing up the guidelines. In addition, it is intended that when the neighbourhood coordinators are appointed, they will look through the comments themselves, as many of them will be directly relevant to either the area they are working on or the issues organisations and groups they will be working with.

Some of the key issues raised in the general comments can be grouped into five broad themes: top down dangers; agencies to be involved; relationships with existing forums; boundary issues and; the size of forums and lower level involvement.

Top down dangers

A number of points were made that could be listed under this theme:

- there is a danger that the forums could be dominated by the Council and other statutory agencies
- there is a culture of things being done to/for the people rather than by the people

- don't overload forums with having too many plans or big agendas
- Council people need to ensure their communications are not full of technical jargon and 'Council speak'

Agencies to be involved

Some respondents mentioned agencies or organisations that should be involved and that had not been given sufficient mention in the consultation paper:

- Educational organisations/ schools: a number of issues were raised on this by the City of Leicester School and Sixth Form Centre which we will need to take up as the forums are developed in each area. However, Leicester College made the general comment that 'we would like to support this venture and offer our help to make it a reality'.
- Education and Social Service departments of the Council: One existing Area Forum made the comment that 'unless the big departmental players in Leicester City Council take forums seriously as a sounding board and planning structure, they will become tokenistic and discredited.'
- Faith groups: such groups have a special role which is distinct from that of the voluntary sector, and they should be involved

Relationships with existing forums and local planning

There were some issues about the relationship between these forums and existing structures and processes, for example:

Saffron Area Forum said that there are already existing planning arrangements for SRB, Sure Start, Lifelong Learning and Community Development and crime and disorder. So it was felt that a community plan for the area should be a 'simple and transparent summation [of these], rather than a stand alone new document'.

The three Tenants and Residents Associations in North West Leicester were opposed to the setting up of new forums, making reference in some cases to problems experienced in Leicester North West Community Forum. It was felt that the forums could destabilise the existing tenants and residents associations – and it was suggested that it would be more effective to increase the voice and funding of existing TAs.

Boundary issues

Three respondents mentioned issues about boundaries. Their comments tended to focus on the recommended changes to ward boundaries. This is because proposals for boundaries for the forums had not been developed at the time of writing the consultation

paper, other than the proposal that the boundary for the city centre should be based on the inner ring road.

Highfields Area Forum said that 'Highfield's identity may not conform to the new boundary changes'

Saffron Area Forum 'vetoed any suggestion to merge Saffron and Eyres Monsell, which was generally unpopular on both estates'. They drew attention to differences between both estates, as Eyres Monsell had no SRB funding nor a Sure Start project'.

Charles Street Local Policing Unit suggested that the boundary of the city centre should be extended to also include all of New Walk, Leicester University and Victoria Park.

The size of forums and lower level involvement

One respondent said that they felt that the size of the areas would be too large and that sub forums would be needed. At Saffron Area Forum it was felt that because of concerns about the differences between Saffron and Eyres Monsell 'forums might have to allow for sub group meetings that fed into a larger forum to allow for a continuing sense of neighbourhood identity'.

In contrast however, there are issues about having too many groups. For example Woodgate Residents Association commented that although they felt the forums would be too large there would be a problem in having too many sub groups: 'one major problem with this is the sheer amount of work. The Woodgate Residents Association would then be operating at three levels, the forum, the sub forum and in Woodgate itself. People do not have enough time for this, whether they are volunteers or staff'.

Responses to the 20 questions raised in the consultation paper

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Should there be core guidance for Neighbourhood Community Plans, and if so, should the suggested outline guidance on neighbourhood planning on page 11 of the consultation paper form the basis of the guidance? |
|---|

The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that there should be core guidance for Neighbourhood Community Plans and that the guidance in the consultation paper was a good starting point. Respondents also said that community plans should start with the community's own vision for the area, and that neighbourhood community plans should have clear capacity for issues of local concern. One person said that 'evidence based' approaches can often seem bureaucratic and off putting to people, and another person suggested that there should be a 3-4 page summary of the plan which is easy to read and would have pictures in it.

2. Neighbourhood planning should be evidence based, Much data is easily available and is being used. Should we require the data listed on page 13 of the consultation paper to be collected as standard in all areas as part of area planning and identifying needs?

Most respondents were in favour of core data being made available for each area. But very few commented on the specific suggestions for core data that were made in the consultation paper. However a number of related points were also made, for example:

- data should be validated by the community themselves
- there needs to be scope for data which is also specific to the community
- there was concern about the resources needed to collect data
- the data used should be reviewed after time to make sure it was still relevant and useful
- there is a need for a central coordinating point for data collection and a need for streamlining the processes between and within agencies

3. Should each area be required to:

- produce a community capacity building plan (this would need to be based on a clear definition of 'capacity')
- carry out an assessment of social capital in the area. (Some work of this type has been done in Saffron)
- set measureable community capacity targets

Or should there be no specific requirement – just a general requirement in the core terms of reference to build capacity?

Opinion was evenly split as to whether forums should actually produce plans or just be required to build capacity.

4. Should each area be required to produce a community involvement and consultation strategy?

The vast majority of respondents were in favour of each area producing such a strategy. However, a comment made by several people was the need to keep the strategy simple and accessible, to give people a model they could work to, and make sure people had ownership of it.

5. What should forums be called? Some options are:

- neighbourhood forums
- neighbourhood community forums
- area forums
- area community forums

or should we leave it to the forum itself to decide?

About 62% chose one of the four options given and 38% said it should be left for the forums themselves to decide. But of those respondents who did choose an option, opinion was fairly evenly split amongst the four given, with 'neighbourhood forum' slightly in the lead. Some respondents however also added that there was a need for consistency, and one said that it was important to name the forums in a way that would avoid confusion with other forums that already exist.

6. Is it agreed that forums will need to have a common constitution or terms of reference and protocol? What are the key issues that will have to be covered in the constitution and protocol?

All except two respondents said that the forums would need a constitution and many of them commented that there would need to be scope for the forums to decide some elements of the constitution themselves, with guidance. Some gave useful ideas as to what should be included and cited examples of existing constitutions that could be drawn from.

7. Is it agreed that a neighbourhood forum should be drawn from group of people who:

- have a stake in the area concerned (eg people living, working or studying there, local businesses, etc); and
- represent people who have a stake in the area concerned (eg people from local community groups);

Around half commented either that it was only residents who should be on the forums or that residents should be in the majority. Two respondents suggested setting quotas to make sure the balance was right. One respondent said that educational institutions should be part of the forums.

8. What are your views on the role of Councillors and their voting rights on the forums?
- Should they automatically be members of the forums if they represent wards covered by the forums?
 - If so, what should their voting rights be -
 - a. Councillors **do not** have a vote. The case for this option is that it would be in keeping with the principle that they are forums for the community, and it would reduce the risk of Councillors dominating the forum. Councillors are there to *respond* to the views of forums. This is the preferred option of the Council's Cabinet members.
 - b. Councillors **do** have a vote. The case for this option is that all members of the forum would have equal rights.
 - c. **Only** Councillors vote, and the other members of the forum do not have a vote. The case for this is that although forum members need to have an input into decision making, it is the Councillor who is the elected representative.

A large majority of respondents (72%) favoured option a. for the reasons given under that option in the question. Of the rest, 21% favoured option b and 7% were unsure or gave an unclear response.

9. Should the area be subdivided and representatives sought from each sub area? For example, this system is currently operating in Leicester North West and Greater Humberstone SRB areas.

Most people agreed, but a significant number thought that although it was a good idea, it should be left to local determination as to whether and how it should be done.

10. Should the number of seats on each forum be specified in the guidance?
Or should we specify the maximum number (on the grounds that very large meetings are not usually effective), and the minimum and quoracy numbers?

There was quite a mixture of responses to this. Only two respondents said that no guidance should be given. About a third felt that guidance should be given on minimum, maximum and quoracy levels. Amongst the other two thirds the majority favoured giving guidance on maximum numbers. A few said it should be for local decision.

11. Should we specify that each forum has or seeks support from:

- The elected Members for all wards contained in the area
- A representative of the police (eg Local Policing Unit Commander(s))
- A representative of health services (eg PCT neighbourhood coordinator)
- A representative (or more than one) of voluntary sector groups working in the area
- A representative (or more than one) of businesses in the area

A little over half the respondents agreed that support for the forum should be sought from all the above groups. Examples of reasons given from those that disagreed were:

- 'it would be difficult for [professionals] to listen to communities without overly influencing them'
- 'the police already have a robust consultative structure in place'
- 'pressure from the top'
- 'a mature forum...would have a far more extensive network. Include a more generalized statement about cooperation, lobbying, campaigning needed to achieve goals'
- 'it may be more appropriate for each forum to specify the support they need'

12. Have the key support people from the Council been identified correctly? Are there other roles that will have to change significantly to support the work of neighbourhood forums?

Proposed key support people

- council management
- council officers responsible for key services in the area
- community development
- policy and information
- communication
- secretarial
- administrative

Not many respondents commented on the actual list but those that did tended to support it. One respondent suggested adding planning and development, another suggested that legal and financial support would be needed, and another suggested Housing, Education and Social Services.

Generally, a wide range of comments were made in response to this question. Several people made the point that all staff needed to be refocused and retrained to work with the forums: 'there is no officer that will not be supporting the forums – all roles will have to change significantly', 'a programme to support organisational development would be more useful initially'.

Another point made was that there was a danger of professionals overshadowing the process: 'the appearance of large numbers of Council staff at meetings risks alienating rather than engaging [local people]'. But also there is a need for continuity: 'people in New Parks have had problems in the past when agencies/departments have withdrawn, or changed the individuals involved in an area'.

Two respondents gave particularly useful observations: 'we believe this has to be handled with sensitivity. The relationship with the Neighbourhood Manager is fundamental, but the introduction of the others must always be appropriate and according to need'. And 'If a Council member is present (neighbourhood coordinator) would it be better to consider that member acting as a facilitator to gain access to these groups'.

13.1 How should people become members of the forum?

- a. Should representatives from community groups in the area be sought?
- b. Should individuals who live in the area be sought?
- c. Should a combination of both be sought? And if so, should a certain number of seats be allocated for representatives of groups and a certain number for individuals?

There was an even split between option a and option c.

13.2 Should there be elections or other methods of selecting members such as nominations? If elections, the cost of running an election in an area could be around £25,000.

a. Should the cost of elections be paid for by the Council from the Council Tax? (This could result in cuts in services or an increase in Council Tax as there is no separate budget available)

or

b. Should the cost be met from the £50,000 budget which will be allocated to each area?

Of those that expressed a preference, two thirds preferred nominations as the method of selection, rather than elections. The reasons given for being against elections were: the cost of elections were not a good use of scarce resources (especially given the likelihood of low response rates), and it was too much of a barrier to encouraging involvement. Some people said this should be left open ended for the future though as the forums increased in power and responsibility then perhaps elections would be more appropriate.

14. Should a Councillor chair the forum at first, with the aim of finding local leadership within a set period? How should the Councillor be chosen?

The majority of respondents were not in favour of a Councillor chairing the forum, even for an initial period. Most wanted the forums themselves to select a chair right from the outset. A couple of respondents suggested that the Neighbourhood Coordinator could chair the meeting until a suitable person was chosen.

15. After the initial period, should we specify that the chair of the forum must be:

- elected by the forum
- rotated within a set period
- any other options?

The favourite option was for chairs to be elected by the forums on an annual basis. A couple of respondents added that there should be a proviso that the same person should not be allowed to chair for more than three years.

16. Should people attending neighbourhood forums have their out of pocket expenses paid? (If so it is likely that the cost will come from the £50,000 allocated for each forum).

A large majority of respondents supported this proposal. Additional comments that were made were:

- there should be due controls to make sure expenses were claimed and paid fairly
- there should be a cap on the amount people could claim
- there should be an open record of what had been claimed by whom
- only unpaid volunteers should be able to claim. People from statutory agencies or people paid by voluntary and community groups who were attending as part of their work duties should not be able to claim. We should encourage those organisations to properly support their employees to attend.

17. How should neighbourhood forums be represented on the Leicester Partnership? For example, should there be a representative from each forum in the Leicester Partnership assembly or directly on the partnership itself?

Many people did not have a clear view on this question. But those that did tended to favour the option of having representatives from the forums on an assembly of the Leicester Partnership rather than on the board itself. Reasons given were that it was not appropriate to the role of the board and it would make the board too large.

One suggestion made was that 2-3 of the 10 representatives from the forums who were on the assembly could then be on the board on a rotational basis.

Another suggestion was that 'there should be two representatives from each forum invited to the annual partnership assembly, and the forums should elect two onto the partnership to represent the neighbourhood forums as a whole, one of which should be from the regeneration areas of the city. No forum can nominate itself!'

All the responses to this question have been passed on to the officer overseeing the current review of the Leicester Partnership to help inform the recommendations of that review.

18. Should the City Centre Board and Forum be developed to include the interests of other stakeholders in the city centre, such as residents, or should the city centre neighbourhood forum overlay other neighbourhood forums covering the city centre?

About two thirds of respondents made a choice between the two options suggested here, and of those the majority of preferred the first option – developing the city centre forum to include the interests of other stakeholders in the city centre – ie residents of the city centre and people living in Leicester as a whole. This would in effect mean that the neighbourhood forum that covers the proposed new castle ward would not have any more of a role in city centre issues than any other forum.

One person said that mechanisms need to be in place to consult all forums about city centre issues

19. Should the neighbourhood coordinator post, be different for the city centre given the role of the existing City Centre Manager? Should this post concentrate on helping the City Centre Manager, Board and Forum engage with non business stakeholders and with coordinating Council services in the City Centre?

A little over two thirds of the respondents to this question expressed a preference and of those, two thirds agreed with the proposal.

20. Should neighbourhood forums be subject to evaluation as described on page 36 of the consultation paper?

Respondents to this question were unanimous in their support for some kind of evaluation. However several made the point that the way the evaluation was designed and carried out was important:

- 'should not be based on simple number counting but include how the new arrangements are helping engage with local people'
- 'the concern about existing evaluation instruments is that they will be imposed'
- 'I would suggest a light touch inspection'
- 'forums should be objectively evaluated. Not by members of the Council'
- 'your proposed evaluation seems very top down'
- 'evaluation should be undertaken by an independent team'
- 'an outside team would need to have a large percentage of community representation and a small percentage of council representation'.

List of Respondents

Organisations

Leicestershire Constabulary
Eastern Leicester Primary Care Trust
Leicester City West Primary Care Trust
Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service
City Centre Manager
Leicester Constabulary, Charles Street Local Policing Unit
Anonymous (member of City Centre Management Board?)
Centre Manager, Haymarket Shopping
University of Leicester
City of Leicester School and Sixth Form Centre
Leicester College
Leicester Housing Association Ltd
Leicestershire Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Institute of Directors
Harvey Ingram Owston, Solicitors
Matrix Business
Chair of Governors, Scraftoft Valley Primary School
Braunstone Community Association Sports Action Zone
Leicester North West Community Forum
Stocking Farm and Abbey Rise Tenants and Residents Association
Mowmacre Tenants and Residents Association
Beaumont Leys Tenants and Residents Association
Evington Valley Community and Residents Association
Woodgate Residents Association
Saffron Area Forum
Highfields Area Forum
Belgrave Association Neighbourhood Forum
Linwood Centre Community Association
New Parks Community Partnership
Anglican Church, Diocese of Leicester
Church of the Martyrs

Councillors

Councillor Geoff Walker

Individual Residents

K. Axon
R. Aldwinckle
C. Blackburn
R. Ball
A. G. Simmons
Anonymous

Council Employees

Paul Ackroyd

Hetha Copeland

HW Davis

Geoffrey Payne

Paul Quinn

Angela Sutaria

Richard Watson

Committee Services

City Landscapes Management Team

Highway Management Team Leaders

Urban Regeneration Team

Cathy Carter, 252 6719
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Chief Executive's Office
Leicester City Council

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