

Leicester
City Council

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Revitalising Neighbourhoods

**Guidelines
for
Neighbourhood Forums
in Leicester**

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Introduction

BACKGROUND: THE REVITALISING NEIGHBOURHOODS PROJECT

Leicester City Council has developed a major project called 'Revitalising Neighbourhoods'.

During November and December 2001 the Council (assisted by the Office for Public Management) consulted Council staff, trades unions, partners, local organisations and the public about a range of proposals under the project. The outcome of this consultation was studied carefully, and final proposals were agreed by Council on 21 March 2002.

As a result the Council:

- has created 10 neighbourhood coordinator posts. It is intended that these posts will be filled by Autumn 2002. The role of the neighbourhood coordinator will be to provide a major interface between the council and the city's communities, coordinate Council services in their area, develop effective working partnerships and ensure effective community consultation, involvement and development.
- is arranging for a number of services to be managed on a more local level so that people can have the opportunity to better influence how those services are run
- is changing a number of ways in which the Council operates, for example some of the departmental structures
- is setting up neighbourhood forums across the city. Seven of the decisions made in the revitalising neighbourhoods project were specifically about setting up forums, and they are presented at Annex A.

Ten area forums will be set up in the city. They will be based on groupings of the new ward boundaries which come into effect in May 2003, with the exception of the city centre which will have its own forum. The boundaries of the forums are shown on the map at Annex B.

The Council carried out a consultation exercise during June and July 2002 to ask people in more detail how they thought forums should be developed and run. A report which summarises the findings of the consultation is available from the Revitalising Neighbourhoods Team.

This guidance has been developed as a result of the findings of the 2001 consultation on the revitalising neighbourhoods proposals as a whole, and as a result of the findings of 2002 consultation over the more detailed issues concerning forums.

HOW THE GUIDANCE WILL BE USED: CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT

This guidance will be used as a basis for developing and setting up the neighbourhood forums.

The guidance has been informed by extensive consultation, by looking at what works in other cities, and by talking to people who are already working with similar arrangements in Leicester. But this is also a continuous learning exercise, and it is important that we draw on the learning that will come in the months and years ahead.

As the forums develop and operate, and at a later date when they are evaluated, we will work with the forums to develop the guidance to reflect the issues and problems that arise. And through the guidance, and through other forms of support, development and training, we will seek to draw on the experience of trying to make the forums as effective as possible and use that experience to fuel continuous improvement in the way they work.

GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

One of the main points that was agreed as a result of the first consultation exercise, is that forum arrangements need to be:

developed from on what already exists in areas at the moment

but they should ***improve what there is over time***

So the aim in developing this guidance has been to ***get the balance right between planning as well as we can in advance of the forums being set up, and also creating the flexibility which will allow the forums to develop in the best way for their area and the issues they face.***

One consultee commented:

‘ 20% of the change will need to be immediate (to show determination) and 80% incremental, starting with issues of local importance’

Leicester City Council Senior Managers Forum, 14 November 2001

WORKING WITH EXISTING ARRANGEMENTS

For many people in Leicester who are already working in area based arrangements – such as existing forums and community partnerships – the development of a new forum in the area may be seen as unnecessary, or at worse unhelpful. So it is important that the key people steering the setting up of the new forums work closely with people who are already involved in existing area based arrangements. They will need to talk through how the arrangements can work and seek joint agreement on the way to manage the new arrangement.

How the existing and new arrangements will work together will differ according to each area and the preferences of the key players and forums already there. But there is a range of options that could be discussed at area level. For example, existing forums and new forums could simply agree to keep each other informed they could consult each other, they could work jointly on some issues, or have some shared membership. Ultimately there may be circumstances where an existing forum may decide to merge into the new forum.

HOW WILL THE FORUMS BE SET UP?

Ten neighbourhood coordinators - one for each of area of the city - should be in post in the autumn 2002.

Forum Steering Groups

Neighbourhood coordinators in each area will then work with ward Members, Council officers, primary care trusts, the police, faith groups and the voluntary and community sector to **set up a neighbourhood steering group**. The job of the steering group will be to decide, in consultation with local people, how the forum will be developed in that area. The guidance on neighbourhood forums, will be used as a basis for the planning and design of the forum, but the steering group will plan and manage a project to set it up.

The area steering groups would be responsible for promoting the forums and encouraging local involvement, with support from officers in the City Council and hopefully from other organisations too.

Forum Support Teams

Once the forums are up and running the steering group should review its membership and way of working in order to try to create a cross agency **forum support team**. One of the main aims of the proposal to set up neighbourhood

forums is to develop better partnership/joint working at a local level. It is proposed that one of the key roles of the neighbourhood coordinator will be to try to create a team of people whose job it would be to support the forum. Ideally this team would play a full role in supporting the forum by:

- attending forum meetings, where relevant, to listen and act on local issues, both by taking issues of relevance back to their respective organisations and by working jointly with other local partners to help solve problems
- consulting the forums, and involving them in wider decision making
- using the forums as a basis for wider community consultation and involvement in decision making over both local issues and wider strategic plans and issues
- helping the forum to develop and implement the neighbourhood community plan

The forum will need to be supported by people who have the responsibility or power to affect change in that area, such as the ward Councillors, Police, Primary Care Trusts, people from the voluntary and community sector, faith groups, people from local schools or other educational establishments, Council officers and others.

These people will not be members of the forum should not attend forum meetings and events on a regular basis; if they did there would be a serious danger that they rather than the forum members would dominate the process. It is suggested that the key people who need to attend all forum meetings are the neighbourhood coordinator and the ward Councillors. Others could then attend when there are issues or items of special relevance to them. One of the key roles of the neighbourhood coordinators will be to act as a lynchpin between the forum and the people supporting it. This arrangement will help achieve continuity and coordination between the forum and the agencies with which it needs to work.

As it develops, the forum is likely to have an extensive network of contacts and relationships. It might be working cooperatively with some groups and organisations towards common goals. In other situations it might be lobbying and campaigning to raise local issues and influence decision making.

It is hoped that other organisations will use the forums' mechanisms and the processes associated with them as a means of enhancing community involvement in their work, or as a way of supplementing the community involvement arrangements they already have.

Some quick changes?

In order to stimulate interest and involvement, one of the first things the forum could do is to carry out an exercise to identify some '**quick changes**' that people want to see happen in the area. This would help **to attract and encourage people to get involved or have an input**. Quick changes are discussed in a little more detail under 'activities of forums'.

Purpose of neighbourhood forums

The purpose of neighbourhood forums will be to help communities and local services improve local outcomes by improving and joining up local services and making them more responsive to local needs.

(from PAT 4 'Neighbourhood Management' report, Social Exclusion Unit - describing the role of neighbourhood coordinators)

Forums will:

- provide a key consultative mechanism for the Council and other agencies
- advise the Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees on issues of interest in their area
- help the Council and other agencies to listen to and respond to communities
- build local partnerships
- develop local area plans
- directly inform some decisions taken by the neighbourhood coordinator under delegated powers relating to the management and resourcing of certain services and projects.

This statement is a core element of the model constitution for the forums.

Boundaries

The boundaries for the forums will be based on groupings of the new wards for Leicester, which will come into effect in May 2003. A map of the wards and the forum boundaries is at Annex B. However, the city centre will have its own forum based on the area lying within the inner ring road. This area falls into the northern end of the new Castle ward. This means that the forum for Castle and Knighton wards will not cover that end of Castle. (There is further discussion of the city centre later in these guidelines.)

Neighbourhood Community Plans

Community Planning is one of the main ways in which joint working in which joint working between service providers, and public involvement, can be brought together. Neighbourhood community plans can drive change by:

- helping people to agree on what they want for the area
- acting as a focus for community involvement
- helping include the voice of marginalised communities
- helping service providers understand local needs
- being used to plan and monitor
- connecting citywide and national priorities to local priorities – or identify conflicts between them

Once the forum is adequately established one of main features of the work of the neighbourhood forum will be to put together and implement a **neighbourhood community plan**. Neighbourhood community planning needs to strike a difficult balance between 'bottom up' priorities (identified by people in the area) and 'top down' priorities from key strategies such as those operating on a city wide or national level. However, although there can be conflicts between local and citywide priorities, in the majority of cases the issues and goals are likely to be common to both.

The key features of the neighbourhood community plan are that they should be:

- succinct, clear and accessible to ordinary people
- produced through and with existing area based plans and initiatives. In some areas, plans are being developed in response to New Deal for Communities, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund or other area based initiatives. It may be that existing plans satisfy many of these requirements for area planning
- action plans for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), to comply with the city's NRF Strategy.
- the product of close consultation and involvement from local partners and the local community
- include a vision for the longer term of what the area should be like in several years time
- evidence based – i.e. based on a balanced assessment of local needs and priorities and the characteristics of the community
- addressing the major elements of any social exclusion, inequality and poor community cohesion present in the area (see next section)
- taking into account the six major themes of the Community Plan for Leicester and include action to achieve the goals in the Community Plan for that area. (Future city wide community plans will in turn partly draw on the neighbourhood community plans themselves).
- containing a list of actions to be achieved in the area that are 'smart' (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timed). This could be linked to neighbourhood renewal 'floor targets' PSAs and/or regeneration 'outputs and outcomes'.
- used as one of the tools for evaluating the effectiveness of the forum itself

Neighbourhood plans could have two parts. The main plan setting out the goals in a clear, attractive and accessible way for the public, and a more detailed document needed, for example by professionals to ensure clarity about who does what and for monitoring purposes. In some cases there will be existing plans that provide this detail.

As the city wide Community Plan for Leicester is developed, it in turn will need to be informed by the neighbourhood community plans, especially where there are common themes and issues emerging from the neighbourhood community plans.

Equal Opportunities, Social Inclusion and Community Cohesion

Promoting equality, tackling social exclusion and developing community cohesion are fundamental to the Revitalising Neighbourhoods project and the neighbourhood forums proposals within it.

Neighbourhood forums will need to:

- define and respond to local needs, and build responses to inequality and social exclusion into their planning and monitoring processes;
- consider the factors leading to unrest in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in Summer 2001 identified in the Denham report 'Building Cohesive Communities' (Home Office 2001). These factors are set out in the box at the end of this section.
- consult and involve local people in ways which reach all sections of the community, including hard to reach groups;
- base planning and decision making around data and opinion research which takes into account the demographic characteristics of the area, and the differences of experience and attitude between different groups;
- build capacity amongst its members and the wider community, in ways that address the disadvantages experienced by different groups;
- ensure that its agenda, activities and membership are as representative of the area as possible;
- bring further local intelligence to the development of city wide strategies and plans, including the perspectives of people may not normally have the opportunity to influence these processes; and
- work with other forums and communities across the city on common issues

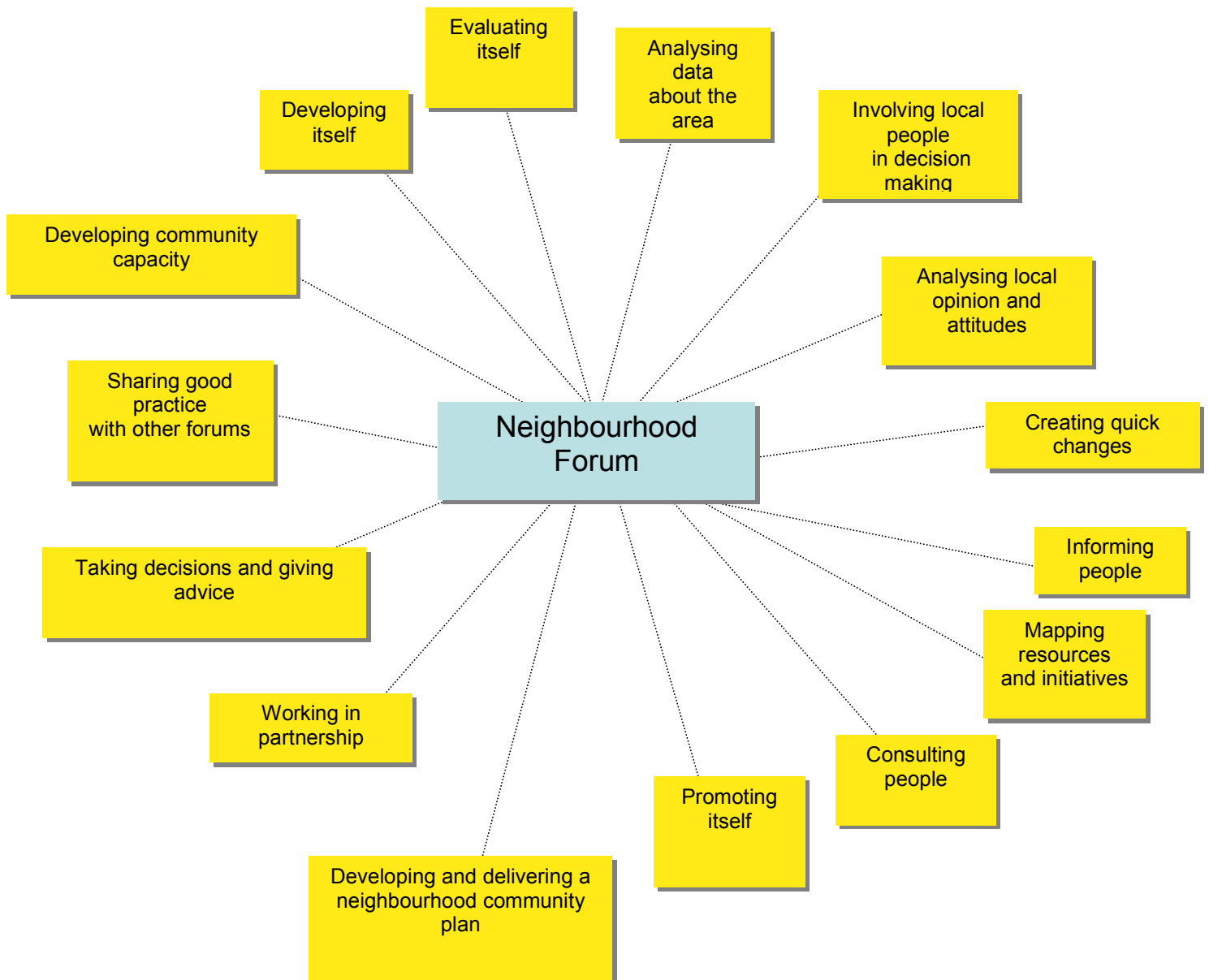
Community Cohesion

Factors leading to community unrest in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in Summer 2001 identified in the Denham report 'Building Cohesive Communities' (Home Office 2001).

- lack of strong civic identity
- segregation
- disengagement of young people
- weak community leadership
- inadequate youth facilities
- unemployment, particularly amongst young people
- activities of extremist groups; and
- weak police responses to community issues, particularly racial incidents

These issues are being looked at nationally and on city wide basis. But there are elements that can be tackled locally For example, how segregated are communities in the area,? What provision and future opportunities are there for young people? Do the police tackle local racial incidents effectively?

Activities of neighbourhood forums



It is expected that neighbourhood forums will engage in a wide range of activities:

Promoting the forum: Early on the forum will need to carry out an information campaign to tell people about its setting up and to encourage them to get

involved. It is proposed that there should be a city wide campaign to promote forums, at the appropriate time, but there will also need to be a more targeted campaign in each area at the time the neighbourhood forum for that area is being set up. This campaign could be focused on the need to identify some quick changes that people want in the area (see below). Promotional activities should encourage interest and involvement. But we know from regeneration initiatives in the city that there can be a danger of raising expectations too high – so a balance needs to be struck between the two.

Thereafter, the forum will need to make sure there is effective and accessible information about the forum and its activities (see 'inform' below) and there will also need to be a variety of ways in which the forum can get feedback from people to help it develop and improve.

Identifying and implementing early improvements ('quick changes'): Many of the public responses to the consultation confirm that the most important thing to many people is to see some basic tangible changes:

"...we do not need more bureaucracy, just more basic services. Sweep the paths and kerbs, trim the grass, repair lights etc. "

"...I would like to see the graffiti cleaned up"

"...we need to make dog owners more aware of their dog's fouling"

examples from comments from responses to consultation in Link magazine

It is important in building confidence and interest that the forums are seen as being able to make a difference early on in their development. Often the things people want to see done may not difficult to address. So it is proposed that when forums are set up they should ask local people to help them identify a small number of quick changes that can be achieved in the area within six months of their inception. These should be tangible physical changes that will be of psychological (and actual!) benefit to people in the area.

The need to identify quick changes could provide a useful focus for the information campaign that will need to be carried out to inform people about the setting up of the forum in their area and to encourage them to get involved.

Consulting people: Consult local people on local issues and services in an accessible and appropriate way. (See the Council's intranet Consultation Toolkit).

Informing people: Ensure accessible and appropriate information is provided to people in the area about:

- public services in the area
- local issues and initiatives
- the community itself and community events
- the forum itself, its decisions and how to get involved or have your say
- plans affecting the local area

This could be through a number of means including the development of neighbourhood information centres and electronic access. This work is being taken up in another strand of the Revitalising Neighbourhoods project which includes for example piloting a new pilot Customer Services Centre in New Parks.

Deciding and advising: As well as developing its neighbourhood plan and implementing through other agencies, the forum will need to act locally on a range of more immediate issues in the area.

Initially, forums will have no direct executive power themselves. However, it should have close links with those that do have power to make decisions, either through its membership or through networking. So the aim of the forum should be to target its advice and recommendations appropriately and effectively. To do this people supporting the forum will also need to have an understanding of the main decision making processes affecting their communities: for example the job of the neighbourhood coordinator, service providers, the decision making processes of the Council, other partners and central Government.

For the Council, the Revitalising Neighbourhoods project proposed that the Council develops local arrangements for managing/coordinating a range of services. As part of this, the neighbourhood coordinator will work closely with service managers.

Developing effective partnership working: One of the main goals of neighbourhood forums will be to develop more joined up working in the area. This will necessitate effective partnership working between public, private voluntary and community groups both in formal settings and informally too. The Police and Health have already said that they would be keen to be a part of this process. The proposals for Forum Support Groups should help to ensure that key professionals work in close contact not only with the forum itself but also with each other.

Analysing information about attitudes and opinions in the area. The forum will need to have a good understanding about the perceptions and attitudes of people in the area and how they compare with other areas of the city and the city as a whole. Much will be able to be gleaned from citywide opinion research carried out by the Council and other agencies (eg the three year MORI survey),

best value opinion research or the crime and disorder survey), and research carried out as part of area based initiatives. The forum may also decide to carry out it's own research – especially if it wants to have more detailed information about issues affecting the area itself, or to have a more detailed picture of the differences of opinion between different groups in the area.

Anecdotal evidence can also be important too - the experiences that individuals have can also be a source of useful information - even if it needs further verification.

Together, the data about the people in the area and the issues of the area will form a sound 'market information' basis for future planning and performance measurement.

Mapping existing resources and initiatives in the area: The forum will need to build on and develop existing initiatives and understand the pattern and nature of existing mainstream and initiative based resources coming into the area. This will help to assess whether resources are being targeted at priority issues and needs, to influence them to make sure they are, and to provide a platform from which to attract further resources into the area. It is proposed that much of the groundwork for this could be done by the Revitalising Neighbourhoods Project Team once the neighbourhood boundaries have been agreed.

Analysing data about the area: One of the main purposes of neighbourhood forums will be to ensure a more coordinated approach to developing the area, to base service planning on evidence, and to measure the impact and effectiveness of services and initiatives over time and between different groups. For key players such as the Council, the Police and the Health Authority, some of the data could form part of their approach to performance management eg best value and public service agreements.

The choice of data will need to be supported by the forum itself. It will need wherever possible to differentiate between different groups of people eg in terms of ethnicity, gender, disability, age, etc in order to allow the forum to plan for and measure the effectiveness of initiatives and service intended to reduce social inclusion and promote equalities.

At the time of writing this guidance a project is being developed by the Council, using Finnemore Consultants, to identify key data to be collected on an area basis and to set up the systems needed to collect the data in future.

It will also be important to periodically review what data is collected to see if it is still valid for both the community and for agencies.

Developing itself and its members: a forum is a team - and teams, like people, do best if they learn and grow. Key members of the forum need to manage the effectiveness of the forum as a team, and take steps to improve and develop the

team as a whole and its individual members in the light of evaluation described below. Forums should be able to assess and manage themselves, become 'investors in people' and promote equality through the way they work. Part of the capacity building needed in the area will need to focus on current and future members.

Developing community capacity and involving local people in decision making and service provision: Community involvement and empowerment can only happen where the community itself is sufficiently skilled and supported. One of the roles of the forum will be to oversee the development of community capacity in the area. This might mean starting from scratch, or simply working with or developing existing community capacity building work already going on the area.

Effective involvement by residents in regeneration initiatives involves:

- allowing adequate time-scales
- providing support and training
- access to independent advice
- information and clear communication
- access to resources
- real commitment from power holders
- a willingness to work with residents as equals
- getting results; and
- accountability and controls to prevent abuse.

The key benefits of resident involvement are:

- local people, *once they believe that neighbourhood regeneration is possible*, bring expertise, new ideas, enthusiasm and energy to the process
- local people, especially if they are supported by appropriate independent advice, are very capable of contributing to partnerships and making management decisions on the priorities to be addressed in their neighbourhoods; and
- local people's expertise and energy is a resource that exists in all areas, whether additional resources for regeneration projects are available or not.

*from PAT 4 'Neighbourhood Management' report,
Social Exclusion Unit*

It is recommended that the forum support group should work with the forum and with key agencies such to develop community capacity in the area. This might

entail drawing up a community capacity building plan if the forum so wishes. If a plan is drawn up the plan would need to be understood and owned by the community and not just professionals. The community capacity building plan could form part of the neighbourhood community plan itself. The aims of this plan would be to help local people in the area to engage in decision making, including enhancing engagement with the forum itself.

Involving people: The goal of neighbourhood forums must be to empower the community as much as possible to identify and solve local problems. The forum might also want to develop a community involvement and consultation plan outlining how they are going to consult people in the area in the future and how they are going to develop local involvement. This could be linked to or part of the community capacity building plan and/or neighbourhood community plan. But will also need to be simple, accessible and 'owned' by local people as far as possible.

Evaluating itself: As well as evaluating the effectiveness of its work, the forum should be continuously striving to improve the way it operates. Early on in its development the forum needs to decide how it will get feedback from stakeholders on how it is performing from their point of view. It may carry out research to gauge people's knowledge and understanding of the forum. It will need to measure how well it is achieving inclusion through the way it works, and it will need to assess how well it is performing against the neighbourhood community plan.

How would neighbourhood forums operate?

CONSTITUTIONS

Neighbourhood forums will need to operate within a framework that safeguards the public interest. Forum members will be acting in a public capacity, and it is important that there is agreement, clarity and openness about the way in which it operates.

For this reason, each neighbourhood forum will need to have a constitution. Guidance on constitutions is set out at Annex C. In order to ensure some basic safeguards, some of the key elements of the constitution will be common to all neighbourhood forums. If the forum wishes to change any of the compulsory elements of the constitution it must first seek approval from the Cabinet of the

Council, who will themselves take advice before deciding whether to accept the changes. But much of the constitution (and therefore much of the arrangements by which forums will operate) will be for the forum to decide, following proper procedures for agreement and publication of the constitution.

There are many elements which are left for the forums themselves to decide. For those issues the guidance in Annex C is intended to give support, by making suggestions or providing options. There will be other things that forum want to add either at the outset or as it develops and encounters new issues. Examples of constitutions from other places with area based set-ups are available from Policy and Performance Team in the Chief Executive's Office. Advice on constitutions and help in putting them together are available from the Committee Secretariat Section of the Resources, Access and Diversity Department of the Council.

The following sections are guidelines on some of the key issues about how forums will work. These, and a number of other issues are also covered in the guidelines on constitutions for forums that are set out at Annex C.

NAME

Forums will need to choose a name that reflects its purpose and the area it serves. This should be left to the forum itself, but it is recommended that they liaise with other newly emerging and existing forums – perhaps through the neighbourhood coordinators - to ensure there is no duplication or confusion created by the choice of name.

MEMBERSHIP OF FORUMS

'forums should only be made up of people living and working locally. The Council, or Council/Government funded staff should be observers only'

from Social Services Departmental response to consultation

'residents know better than anyone the changes needed in their neighbourhood'

comment from consultation in Link

To be eligible to be a member of the forum a person must either:

- live in the area; or
- represent a local community group that represents people who live in the area

It is recommended that a quota of seats is set for community groups in order to ensure that residents are not outnumbered by community groups.

NUMBER OF SEATS

The maximum and minimum number of seats will need to be decided at the outset. It is recommended that forums of over 30 would be too large, but under 10 too small.

Ward Councillors will form part of the support group

GETTING REPRESENTATIVES FROM ACROSS THE AREA: USING SUBDIVISIONS

One of the concerns that people had in the consultation was that because areas are going to cover quite large areas of the city there was a danger that some parts of the area could get left out of the forum.

Given the size of the area that the forums will cover, it is strongly recommended that the Forum Steering Group sub divide that area into two or three sub areas and allocate seats for each sub area. This sub division could be along 'natural' boundaries rather than ward boundaries.

ELECTIONS or NOMINATIONS TO FORUMS

It is recommended that in the first instance members of the forum are sought by nomination rather than election. This is because of the high cost of elections and because of the barriers elections can represent to certain groups. The forum steering group should advertise for individuals living the area to come forward and contact local groups to put themselves forward. If in future it is decided that members will be sought through elections, the cost of the election will be met from the £50,000 allocated to each forum through the Neighbourhood Coordinator.

MAKING FORUMS REPRESENTATIVE

In the consultation exercise over the proposals in phase 1 of the Revitalising Neighbourhoods project many people said that forums 'will need to be representative'. This is one of the easiest things to say and one of the hardest things to do. One of the reasons that people emphasise the issue of representiveness is because of the need of the body concerned to be able to

take on board the issues of as wide a range of local people as possible. But making a body 'representative' in a numerical sense often doesn't achieve this.

It would be wrong to think that a forum that had the same demographic make up as the area was therefore necessarily being inclusive and representative. Equally, people who come from groups that are comparatively small in number lose out in the 'numbers game'. For example African Caribbean people are a much smaller minority in Leicester than Asian people, yet although they share many issues with other black and ethnic minority people around race equality, they also have a significantly different needs. Some communities are not only small – but are not sufficiently powerful or organised to take full advantage of the opportunities that forums might offer – for example gypsies and travellers or Somalis.

So – it is important that, as part of its on going self assessment and evaluation, forums look how they match up to the demography of the area they serve. For example, young people are often under represented in these types of groups; yet engaging young people in community issues is critical now to the future of effective local decision making. If key groups are missing, the forum needs to ask itself what are the barriers to involvement to people in these groups, and what action can it take to remove those barriers within its control. It's important that this doesn't become a 'number crunching' issue. What is more important is that the forum has a good understanding of the issues and agendas of different groups.

It is important that it is open and inclusive in its ways of working, that it seeks to promote equality within itself and in the area it serves, and that it can demonstrate it has had an impact on social exclusion in the area.

Although they can't always be 'representative' in the numerical sense, forums must always try to be representative in the way they work. But to engage a diverse range of people , forums will need other approaches too, such as local fun days, themed events, newsletters etc. These guidelines can only cover some of the basic issues about running traditional style meetings. But the Council and other organisations – particularly in the voluntary and community sector –will act as a support to provide ideas and resources for different ways of reaching people.

VOTING

It is hoped that the vast majority of the decisions of the forum can be reached by seeking consensus.

However in some circumstances the forum may want to vote on an issue. So the arrangements for voting need to be clarified in the constitution.

Each member of the forum should have a vote and this is specified in the constitution.

City Councillors are both key stakeholders and most importantly represent local people through the local democratic process. It is hoped that Councillors will attend forum meetings and take an active role in supporting them. However, their role as ward Councillors is to support their local communities. For this reason Councillors should be seen as members of the Forum Support Team and not be voting members of the forum itself.

COUNCIL OFFICER SUPPORT FOR FORUMS

Neighbourhood forums have a big job to do, and they will not succeed unless they are supported properly - both in the sense of immediate support from people who are working with them, and in the sense of the wider support that the whole Council directs towards it. Lack of support can be the key way in which, unintentionally, forums could be marginalised and therefore fail. The way in which the Council as a whole works to support forums will need to be the focus of a programme of organisational development during the next few months and years. All staff need to be refocused and retrained to work with the forums.

In the meantime forums will need immediate Council support in a number of ways

- management – through the role of the neighbourhood coordinator and corporate director
- Council officers responsible for key services in the area
- community development specialists
- policy and information specialists
- communication support
- secretarial support (to organise and support meetings of the forum)
- administrative support (to support other officers working with the forum)

However the relationship between these people and the forums need to be carefully managed in order to avoid swamping the forums with Council agendas, Council behaviours and language! As with the forum support teams, the neighbourhood coordinator will form an important lynchpin between the two.

CHAIRING MEETINGS

Community leadership skills differ in many respects from the skills one might use to chair a committee meeting, as community leadership is about empowering and facilitating others rather than controlling.

In the early days of the forum, in order to set things going, it may well be necessary to ask someone to take the chair for the first few meetings to get things going. This person could be someone who is already active and experienced in the area (such as a ward Councillor). But the medium to long term aim should be to find local leaders, and not to allow the City Council to necessarily dominate. It may a little while for people on the forum to feel confident or skilled enough to take the chair, but the aim of the forum should be to give people confidence and if necessary training to be able to do this. As long as inclusion and openness can be achieved, then the more that leadership can come from the community itself and can be shared between stakeholders, the better. So the role of whoever is initially in charge should be to empower as many other people to take leadership and responsibility roles themselves too.

During the initial phase the forum will need to decide the mechanism for selecting the chair in future. The commonly favoured approach is for the forum to elect a chair on an annual basis. Forums might also choose to add a further provision that no one person can chair for more than three years running.

STYLE OF FORUM MEETINGS: DISCIPLINE AND CREATIVITY

"...make the forums user friendly and issue focussed. People don't want boring meetings with agendas, minutes, matters arising etc. They want action."

Comments from consultation in Link magazine

The forum will need to have the discipline and transparency associated with regular meetings with clear objectives and clearly recorded decisions. But these do not have to be couched in local government language. It is important that 'committee culture' does not dominate. In order to be effective, forums will need to go beyond bureaucratic models of behaviour, and use informal working methods to bring an entrepreneurial culture and creativity to local work and solving local problems.

The style the forum adopts for different tasks needs to be the best fit for that task.

For example committee style meetings can be effective for formally ratifying decisions that have already been debated and developed elsewhere. But they

are not an effective way of helping a group of people to work creatively on issues. In addition, 'committee culture' creates serious barriers to involvement from people who are not used to that way of working.

But, depending on the objective, the forum may commission working groups to look at particular issues, it may hold debates, workshops, conferences, away days and other events. There is a growing resource of imaginative ways of engaging with people that we can learn from and try.

Forum members, professionals and Councillors will need to be versatile enough to be able to engage in different ways of working. Often a group of people used to interacting as a committee find it difficult to then change – so support and training on these skills will be needed.

DECISION TRACKING

Forums might decide to operate a system of decision tracking - a method of keeping a record of progress on all decisions made by the forum as a means of monitoring progress.

ACCESS, COMMUNICATION AND SAFETY

Forum meetings will have to be accessible in a number of ways. This means taking every possible step to eliminate or minimise barriers which are physical, and those associated with communication, language, subject matter, culture and skills. For example - the London Borough of Brent has produced guidelines on well run meetings (available from the Policy and Performance Team in the Chief Executive's Office).

In addition, the neighbourhood coordinator will have to make arrangements to help ensure the safety of everyone attending the meetings, such making sure there are adequate safety arrangements at meeting venues, and making arrangements to maximise the safety of people travelling to attending meetings (eg seeing that people are not left alone waiting for transport home.)

Depending on the area, suitable venues will need to be identified, and it may be useful to hold meetings in different locations in order to raise awareness and encourage attendance in different parts of the area.

Planning and communication about forum meetings and events

Forums will need to ensure that people are kept informed about its work and decisions. There will need to be agendas and minutes, but many members of the public will not find this an accessible form of communication about what is

planned and what has been discussed and decided. Forums will therefore need to use accessible, open, imaginative and attractive ways of communicating what is going on by using local information points, mailshots, etc and city wide media such as Link and the internet to keep people informed and interested. They will need to think about how to communicate in a way that reaches hard to reach groups.

THE FORUM AGENDA

The forum's agenda will need to contain a mixture of :

- things that the wider local community want to discuss
- things that need to be discussed in order to fulfill the role of the forum (such as the neighbourhood plan)
- things that are issues that might have been placed there by statutory agencies who want a forum view.

There needs to be a proper balance between these types of item, and hopefully there will be some overlap between them!

From experience we know it is likely, particularly at the start, that the people will want to use the forum to air grievances rather than to plan in a long-term way.

This is the experience of neighbourhood forums and committees in other areas where they have been set up, and it is to be expected where there are high levels of dissatisfaction and frustration. Many of the immediate grievances may reflect some of the strategic issues that need to be tackled in the area. It is important that this is respected and managed effectively.

Neighbourhood forums need to show that they can either make a difference to local grievances, or help the public understand why they can't be tackled in the way that the public expects. In the longer term community capacity building can be about helping people to work on immediate issues in a more strategic and 'joined up' way. Either way, the gap in information and understanding about possible solutions needs to be reduced from both sides, by working jointly with the community and starting to soften the 'them and us' mentality on both sides:

The actual format of the agenda will be up to the forum to decide. One key issue that will have to be determined however is whether the public can be present, and if so whether/how they can have an input.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN FORUM MEETINGS

As well as deciding how to inform, consult and engage people living in the area, the forum will have to decide how the public will engage with forum meetings.

As a basic measure, it might be useful to follow the 'access to information, arrangements which govern the conduct of Council meetings which are open to the public.

But beyond that, two issues need to be resolved –

- how members of the public can get things on the forum agenda; and
- what role the public can play in the actual meetings of the forum.

In terms of getting things on the agenda, the forum may decide that members of the public can ask any member of the forum, or a nominated person to put something on the agenda. That person would then discuss the item with the person who asked for it to be put there to decide the best way to present it. The forum might chose to stipulate that items must be put forward a certain amount of time before the meeting. This is so that the agenda can be managed (eg avoiding too many items on one agenda) and so that it is received in time for the publication of the agenda.

There are a number of options the forum can choose from in terms of public involvement in the meetings. They could decide to have special meetings just to hear public issues (either issues in general or particular themes). Experience shows that to attract people these events need to be handled imaginatively to attract as many people as possible. Another option is to have a set period on the agenda when members of the public can raise things, or the public could be invited to comment after each substantive item on the agenda.

Handling public input will need particular skill, in terms of managing expectations, managing the process fairly (eg by agreeing and communicating ground rules), being ready to suggest ways of responding to issues raised, demonstrating that an adequate response has/will be made, managing conflict and making it a positive experience for the public and for the forum. Forum members will have to feel confident that they can handle public input effectively - and this may mean training or development is needed first.

Once the forum has agreed its preferences for public involvement, the arrangement will need to be set out in the constitution and also publicised.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

There may be situations where the forum is concerned with issues involving individuals in the area, for example nuisance neighbours. It must be stressed that neighbourhood forums will not be able to discuss individual people, as this would represent a breach of the rights of that individual.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR FORUM MEMBERS

Some of the barriers to involvement which forum members and the public in general will experience will have to do with the costs of travel and the costs of childcare. In order that these barriers are minimised it has been agreed that forum members on forum business will be able to be reimbursed for the costs of travel to and from forum meetings and the cost of any necessary child care or other care costs, or other out of pocket expenses agreed by the forum. No other expenses should be paid.

Any reimbursement of expenses should be a reimbursement of the sum actually incurred by the forum member, who should produce a receipt to show the cost incurred. Claims for car or bicycle mileage will be paid in accordance with the current rates for Council employees.

Only unpaid volunteers should be able to claim. People from statutory agencies, or people paid by voluntary and community groups who are attending as part of their work duties should not be able to claim from forum funds.

The costs will be met from the budget of £50,000 allocated to each forum. The payments may be made a the petty cash float held by the Neighbourhood Coordinator or through the Council's creditor payments system using a standard claim form, according to the preference of each forum.

The forum may decide to set a limit on the total amount members of the forum can claim in a year. They might consider using the current limit imposed on City Councillors as a guide.

The Neighbourhood Coordinator will be responsible for monitoring the payments and keeping the forum informed of the budgetary implications of the payments made. It is recommended that each forum estimates the likely cost of these and takes account of them in planning its meetings.

FINANCE

Introduction

The management of the finances of each Neighbourhood Forum must be in accordance with the City Council's Finance Procedure Rules, and Contract Procedure Rules (where appropriate), and regulations governing the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. Information on these rules is available from the Accountancy section of the Resources, Access and Diversity Department and will be provided to all Neighbourhood Coordinators.

Budgets

Each Neighbourhood Forum will be allocated a budget each year. For 2003/04 this will be £50,000 for each forum, and the money to fund it from that year will come from the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). The Council wants to get NRF funding from the Government for future years, but at the same time will seek to increasingly support them through its own budgets. The aim is to eventually 'mainstream' the cost of the forums so that it becomes a normal part of the Council's budget, rather than having to rely on time limited Government renewal money.

The responsibility for the management of this budget will rest with the Neighbourhood Coordinator, although s/he will be guided by the forum on the use of the budget.

The budget will be monitored as part of the Council's corporate budget monitoring arrangements, but each forum can request more detailed budget monitoring reports if it wants. The timing and format of these forum reports are something that could be agreed between the forum members and the Neighbourhood Coordinator.

The Neighbourhood Coordinator must keep expenditure within the budget available. If it is likely that the budget is going to be overspent, s/he must discuss it with her/his line manager and the issue will be managed by the Council's Director of Cultural Services and Neighbourhood Renewal as set out in the Council's Finance Procedure Rules.

Under the Government's NRF rules, if the budget is underspent at the end of the financial year, the money cannot automatically be carried over into the next year. The Government expects at least 95% of the budget to be spent, or the unspent money could be taken back.

Once the funding is incorporated into the Council's mainstream budget, it will become part of the budget of the Council's Department of Cultural Services and Neighbourhood Renewal. Under Council rules, no Department is allowed to overspend. This means that underspends of the neighbourhood forums budgets may have to be used to make up for overspends elsewhere in that department's budget.

Spending the budget

The Council wants to give forums as much freedom as possible in deciding how the £50,000 will be used. But there are a few important ground rules that will have to be followed to make sure that the money is managed properly, because the Council is bound by Government legislation and regulations on financial management

The budget must be spent in accordance with the Council's Finance Procedure Rules. In particular, the Neighbourhood Manager must seek value for money in all cases. This will usually be ensured by obtaining competitive quotes for the supply of goods and services.

There are some things that the forum **cannot** ask the neighbourhood coordinator to spend the budget on. These are:

- staffing, where the staff are not been recruited and managed within the Council's Human Resources policies and procedures
- paying any remuneration to members of the forum other than travel and childcare or other care costs or out of pocket expenses agreed by the forum
- buying land or buildings or refurbishing buildings outside the Council's own strategies and plans for property management (although redecorating can be funded)
- making grants to voluntary organisations. The reason for this is that the Council has developed a detailed strategy to ensure consistency in the funding of voluntary organisations across the city, and this would be undermined if the forums had the powers to make grants themselves.
- investing money
- any form of gambling or lottery

Petty Cash

In order to ease the administration of the forums, particularly in respect of the payments of expenses to forum members, it is recommended that each forum is provided with a petty cash float in the sum of £100.

Collecting income

The forums can raise additional income if they wish. Any income raised should be paid into the Council's main bank account in accordance with Finance Procedure Rules and credited to the relevant forum's budget. Income raised in this way will therefore will be available to enhance the forum's budget. However, in order to protect the additional income from being used to offset overspend elsewhere in the Department of Cultural Services and Neighbourhood Renewal it may be useful to set up an 'earmarked reserve account' for each forum. Additional money can be put in this account as long as it is clearly allocated to pay for a specific future use.

Care must be taken to ensure that due account is taken of any VAT implications. The VAT treatment of income raised must be agreed with the Head of Finance for Cultural Services and Neighbourhood Renewal.

Banking arrangements

It is suggested that at this stage there is probably no particular advantage in having separate forum bank accounts, and that the Council's corporate banking arrangements are used. As forums develop and become more independent this arrangement should be reviewed

Neighbourhood forums and the Leicester Partnership

The Leicester Partnership was set up in June 2001. There are 25 members representing major public services, local businesses, community groups and voluntary organisations. They are working together to: agree a vision for the future of Leicester; provide an overview of partnership work in the city; make sure services are working together well to meet the community's needs; plan existing services better; involve local people more in deciding what services are needed; reduce the gaps between the richer and poorer areas of the city and achieve sustainable regeneration and development. They are responsible for neighbourhood renewal in the city and for deciding how to spend the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

Further information about the Leicester Partnership contact Angela Sutaria in the Chief Executive's Office, Leicester City Council, telephone 252 6099, or log on to www.leicesterpartnership.org.uk.

At present there are three representatives from community groups on the Leicester Partnership itself, and other community groups are part of the wider Leicester Partnership Assembly which feeds it's views into the partnership.

However, the Leicester Partnership was reviewed over the Summer 2002 and this review will include proposals as to how neighbourhood forums should be represented on the Partnership.

Neighbourhood forums and Council scrutiny

New political management systems work well where the scrutiny function is most effective. Neighbourhood forums should be able to make a valuable contribution to Council scrutiny work. For example:

- scrutiny committees could examine how well services and policies are working in particular areas
- forums could contribute their experience to the scrutiny of particular policies and services; and
- the knowledge and skills that officers and Councillors develop as part of working with forums will help them in their role on scrutiny committees, and vice versa.

Neighbourhood forums and service performance

Getting good performance from Council services for the area should be one of the general aims of forums, and engaging with best value activities will specifically form some of the activities in which forums will need to eventually engage in. In addition, in a broader sense forums need to aim to become 'best value' organisations themselves: ensuring that they set and communicate clear goals, and they measure their own performance against these goals (see 'Activities of Neighbourhood forums').

Service reviews: Forums could play a key role in best value service reviews. Service reviews could become area based in future, as taking an area view across a range of services might be a useful way of strengthening the cross cutting nature of best value reviews

Consultation: Forums should provide one mechanism for consultation over services and strategy development

Performance indicators: From the outset, neighbourhood plans will need to contain SMART targets that can be measured and communicated. In time, a range of performance indicators could be developed to be area based. In particular, services which area devolved to area level will need to have

performance indicators for their level (both locally defined ones or disaggregated BVPIs and statutory ones).

Some area based indicators will be needed by service managers to see how well their service is doing on an area basis, others might be needed by people in the area themselves – to reflect issues and services which are critical to them; and there will be some that fall into both categories!

Monitoring performance against the neighbourhood community plan: Over time, the neighbourhood plan could be developed as a neighbourhood performance plan – setting out the area plan and measuring performance against the plan in a way that allows people in the area to judge the effectiveness of the forum and the effectiveness of the Council in their area.

The City Centre

CITY CENTRE STAKEHOLDERS

Essentially there are three groups of stakeholders in the city centre :

- businesses who are located in the city centre (or have some other dependence on the city centre)
- people who live in the city centre
- people who visit, work, shop or spend leisure time in the city centre

The last category is important because most people who live in Leicester potentially have an interest in it, and the city centre forum will need to ensure it hears their voice. This could be achieved by having places on the forum for people in the third category, and/or or by using mechanisms such as the People's Panel or focus groups and surveys to find out what people think about city centre issues such as litter and new developments. Additionally, the city centre forum could consult all other neighbourhood forums in the city about city centre issues.

BOUNDARY OF THE CITY CENTRE

Annex B shows the ward boundaries for Leicester which will come into force in May 2003, and the boundaries for the forums, which are based on groupings of those wards.

However, because of its unique nature, the Council decided that the City Centre should have its own neighbourhood forum. This will be based on the most commonly used geographical definition of the city centre - the area lying within the inner ring road. It is the definition used by the City Centre Manager and the existing business based City Centre Forum.

However, it is important that we do not think too rigidly about boundaries. For example, the current City Centre Manager stresses that people who have a stake or an influence in the development of the City Centre are not always physically located there, for example Leicester University, visitor attractions, arterial routes, parking and transport issues.

THE ROLE OF THE 'NEIGHBOURHOOD COORDINATOR' IN THE CITY CENTRE

Unlike other areas, the City Centre already has a 'neighbourhood coordinator' in the shape of the City Centre Manager (although this is not a city Council officer post).

For this reason it is proposed that the role of the neighbourhood coordinator in the city centre should be somewhat different from other areas. The role could be to work with the City Centre Manager, concentrating on:

- service coordination in the city centre and liaison between the City Centre Forum and service providers; and
- working with residents and other non-business stakeholders, e.g. developing consultation and involvement across the city on city centre issues

Evaluation of neighbourhood forums

"We would recommend that some measures of criteria of effectiveness are developed for the forums"

Eastern Leicester NHS PCT response to consultation

Neighbourhood forums will need to be able to evaluate themselves and take responsibility for their own development and improvement. But when neighbourhood forums have had sufficient opportunity to develop, plan and

achieve, it is important that they undergo evaluation (maybe as part of a wider evaluation of the new political management arrangements). It is intended that proposals for how this evaluation will be carried out will be developed and consulted over in more 2003. The purpose of the evaluation would be to assess whether they are working effectively and to identify opportunities for improvement.

To carry out an evaluation, an evaluation toolkit need to be developed with the forums themselves and the forum support teams. It should include checks on equality and inclusion issues, as well as measures of how successful the forum has been in setting and achieving its goals for the area. The evaluation would be reported publicly, to the Council, and to the Leicester Partnership.

Evaluation could be carried out using the evaluation toolkit, by a team consisting of a cross section of people from the public, voluntary and community organisations and the Council. The evaluation will identify the key strengths and recommendations for development.

The audit could look at two main groups of issues:

- Is the forum effective – for example has it added significant value to change in the area it serves, has it delivered what it planned to do?
- Is the forum working well – for example is it inclusive, efficient, open and accountable?