

Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED: Corporate issue

**Procedures Working Party
Finance, Resources and Equal Opportunities
Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet
Council**

29th March 2004

28th April 2004

21st June 2004

1st July 2004

**AREA COMMITTEES FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD IMPROVEMENT:
OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK AND TOOLKIT**

Report of the Corporate Director of Resources, Access & Diversity

1 Purpose of Report

To present for Member's discussion and agreement an operational framework for the establishment of Area Committees in Leicester and a guidance document to support Councillors in their role as members of Area Committees.

2 Summary

- 2.1 In November 2003 the Council agreed in principle to establish Area Committees in Leicester as a part of its commitment to bring about neighbourhood improvements. This new approach provides an opportunity for Councillors to demonstrate community leadership. The purpose of Area Committees would be to provide better solutions to local problems and improve services by giving some key decision making powers to ward Members, and bringing decision making closer to the public.
- 2.2 In simple terms, Area Committees have the potential to support front-line Members in their desire to improve local neighbourhoods. They can provide an opportunity for Members to support the delivery of the Corporate Plan in their locality as well identifying local priorities and issues through the development of area plans. They will also provide an opportunity to link with other local arrangements such as school governing bodies.
- 2.3 The November report set out a broad policy framework for Area Committees, which Members endorsed. Officers were asked to work up a detailed operational framework for Area Committees, which is presented in this report.

2.4 The Procedures Working Party considered the report on the 29th March and their recommendations are appended at A.

2.5 The key areas covered are:

- Legal Framework – Within the Council’s current constitutional framework, to create and set out the roles, powers, boundaries and membership of Area Committees and the rules for the conduct of Area Committee meetings.
- Boundaries - Options for Members on final boundaries for Area Committees, including a definition of the city centre.
- Phased Introduction of Area Committees - A proposal to phase in the introduction of Area Committees and options for Members for potential ‘initial’ areas.
- Delegated Decision Making - Issues about delegated decision making powers for Area Committees for Members’ views on a way forward.
- Community Engagement – Suggested minimum standards for community engagement for Members’ agreement.
- Other Roles for Area Committees – Proposal for the addition of an eighth role for Area Committees, ‘promoting community cohesion’.
- Guidance (in the form of a toolkit) to support Councillors in their role as members of Area Committees.
- Resource Issues – Information on the resource issues associated with the introduction of Area Committees.

3 Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

Legal Framework (See section 2.1 of the main report and Appendix A of the Toolkit)

1. **Agree Terms of Reference for Area Committees and their incorporation into the Council’s Constitution.**
2. **Agree Rules of Procedure for Area Committees and their incorporation into the Council’s Constitution.**

Boundaries (See section 2.2 of the main report)

3. **Agree final boundaries for Area Committees and the city centre.**

Phased Introduction of Area Committees (See section 2.3 of the main report)

4. **Agree whether there will be a phased introduction of Area Committees.**

5. If it is agreed that there will be a phased introduction of Area Committees, agree criteria for selecting initial areas for Area Committees.
6. If it is agreed that there will be a phased introduction of Area Committees, agree initial areas for Area Committees on the basis of the agreed criteria.

Delegated Decision Making (See section 2.4 of the main report)

7. If a phased introduction of Area Committees is agreed, decide in principle whether initial Area Committees will have delegated decision making powers.

Community Engagement (See section 2.5 of the main report)

8. Agree the suggested minimum standards for community engagement (public involvement in Area Committees and consultation by Area Committees).

Other roles for Area Committees (See section 2.6 of the main report)

9. Agree to the addition of 'promoting community cohesion' as an eighth role for Area Committees.

Guidance (See section 2.7 of the main report)

10. Endorse the detailed operational guidance; 'Toolkit for Area Committees'.

Resource Issues (See section 3.2 - 3.4 of the main report)

11. Agree, that unless additional money can be identified, existing Area Forums be given notice of the withdrawal of secretariat support from within Committee Services.

4. Financial & Legal Implications

4.1 *Financial Implications*

The principal financial implications associated with the establishment of Area Committees are covered in Section 1 of the Supporting Information and Section 3 of the main report.

4.2 *Legal Implications*

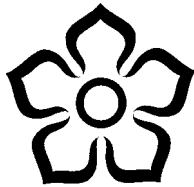
The principal legal implications associated with the establishment of Area Committees are covered in the report.

5 Report Author

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DECISION STATUS

Key Decision	Yes
Reason	Part of Budget and Policy Framework
Appeared in Forward Plan	No
Executive or Council Decision	Council



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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

1 Financial Implications

- 1.1 In November 2003, Cabinet were asked to note a number of potential financial implications associated with the introduction of Area Committees. These issues and subsequent developments are detailed for Members' information in section 3 of this report.
- 1.2 The only direct financial implication arising from this report concerns the cost of having Area Committee meetings. From 2004/05, a sum of £50,000 has been allocated within the Resources, Access and Diversity department's budget for work involved in arranging and running Area Committee meetings.
- 1.3 This level of resourcing will be adequate during the current financial year should Members agree to a phased introduction of Area Committees. It should, however, be noted that in future years this will only provide the bare minimum standards of administrative support that would be required for the Area Committees to operate effectively across the whole city. The frequency of meetings and range of activities Area Committees could undertake would be restricted.
- 1.4 Moreover, this level of resourcing for Area Committees will necessitate the withdrawal of secretariat support from the four existing Area Forums in the city unless additional money can be identified (see Recommendation 11).
- 1.5 Should Members agree in principle that initial Area Committees be given delegated decision making powers (see Recommendation 7) officers will undertake more detailed work on the financial implications and report this back to members. However, it is safe to say that granting delegated decision making

powers to Area Committees will require additional resourcing, primarily in terms of officer time.

- 1.6 In future, Members may decide to give the committees 'top up budgets' to spend on issues of local importance. Should this be the case, as with carrying out delegated decision making powers, Area Committees will need to operate within the Council's normal processes of budgetary control, and meet the Council's financial standards. These are summarised Section 4 of the 'Toolkit'.

*Andy Moreley, Chief Financial Accountant
May 2004*

2 Legal Implications

- 2.1 The Authority's current Constitution enables the Council to appoint Area Committees as it sees fit, if it is satisfied that to do so would ensure improved service delivery in the context of Best Value and more efficient, transparent and accountable decision making.
- 2.2 If the Council wishes to create Area Committees it will need to decide on the functions to be delegated, showing which are the responsibility of Cabinet and which are not, the composition and membership of the Committees, budgets and limitations on delegation, together with Rules of Procedure. These decisions are reserved to Full Council, and once decided on will be incorporated into the Constitution.
- 2.3 The legal framework set out in the attached "Toolkit" is correct.

*Peter Nicholls, Service Director Legal Services
March 2004*

3 Other Implications

3.1

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	PARAGRAPH REFERENCES WITHIN SUPPORTING PAPERS
Equal Opportunities	Yes	Area Committees are intended to increase the involvement of local people and improve services. There are a wide range of equal opportunities issues associated with these goals.
Policy	Yes	A decision to establish Area Committees in Leicester will mark a major policy development for the Council. Proposals for Area Committees have links with community engagement policies, performance management, neighbourhood renewal and political management.
Sustainable and Environmental	Yes	Area Committees are intended to improve local decision making, including decisions, which are likely

		to have an environmental impact in the area.
Crime and Disorder	Yes	Area Committees are intended to improve local decision making, including decisions, which may have an impact on crime and disorder in the area.
Human Rights Act	Yes	Decisions of Area Committees, and the arrangements for Area Committees will be made within the provisions of the Human Rights Act 2000.
Older People / People on Low Income	Yes	Area Committees are intended to improve local decision making, including decisions, which may have an impact on older people and people on low incomes. In addition, Area Committees will be involved in community engagement, and as older people and people on low incomes can be hard to reach groups for consultation, the Committees will have to ensure that these groups are included in community engagement

3.2 Risk Assessment Matrix

	Risk	Likelihood L/M/H	Severity Impact L/M/H	Control Actions (if necessary/or appropriate)
1	<p>Area Committees are under-resourced.</p> <p>A key lesson from other Councils that have developed Area Committees is that they must be adequately resourced.</p> <p>Failure to do so will impact on the effectiveness and impact of Area Committees.</p>	H	H	The optimum level of resourcing for Area Committees is identified and secured.
2	<p>Area Committees do not have the commitment of all concerned.</p> <p>The effectiveness of Area Committees will be limited if there is not commitment from all officers and Members concerned.</p>	M	M	Ensure that the reasons for developing Area Committees and their potential benefits are widely communicated
3	<p>There is insufficient organisational capacity to support Area Committees</p>	H	M	A learning based, evolutionary approach to the development of Area Committees is adopted.
4	<p>Area Committees are not designed to be best suited to deliver the priorities of the Council or reflect the unique characteristics of the city.</p> <p>Experience from other Local Authorities suggests there is not a recognized 'blue print' for Area Committees; they must be designed to suit local characteristics and priorities.</p>	L	M	In considering the detailed design of Area Committees, officers and Members are mindful of the Council's Corporate Direction and Plan, the Community Plan and the views of local people.
5	<p>Community involvement in Area Committees is not meaningful and inclusive.</p>	M	M	Area Committees seek to optimize the level of community involvement by ensuring that

	Public confidence in Area Committees will be diminished if it is perceived that community engagement is not being taken seriously.			meetings are accessible and that new and / or existing resources are used to support involvement, particularly of those normally excluded from the democratic process.
6	Officers and Members do not have the skills required to make Area Committees function effectively. Area Committees will involve more officers in working directly with elected Members and the public and may involve more elected Members in formal decision making.	M	M	Member and officer training and development is designed and rolled out. This could involve a range of activities including learning from other Councils, shadowing / mentoring and formal training in managing meetings, presentation skills etc.
7	If Members' decide to grant delegated decision making to initial Area Committees this may lead to some difficulties. We have not found any precedents for granting delegated decision powers where Area Committees are not in place across the whole local authority area, and are therefore unable to offer detailed advice at this stage. Although at this stage it is not possible to provide detailed costings, Area Committees with delegated decision making powers will require a higher level of resourcing.	M	L	A further report will be prepared on the detailed implications of devolved decision making should Member's agree in principle that initial Area Committees should have these powers. Subsequently, when Members are considering which functions to delegate. Individual service managers will need to advise Members of specific issues or potential problems relating to devolved decision making for their function.

L - Low
M - Medium
H - High

L - Low
M - Medium
H - High

4 Background Papers – Local Government Act 1972

- *Annual Report of the Chief Executive: Revitalising Neighbourhoods*
Cabinet (29th January 2001)
- *Revitalising Neighbourhoods: Guidelines And Boundaries For Neighbourhood Forums*
Organisations Working Party (13th November 2002)
Cabinet (18th November 2002)
Finance, Resources and Equal Opportunities Scrutiny Committee (19th December 2002)
- *Review of Revitalising Neighbourhoods*
Procedures Working Party (23rd June 2003)
- *Revitalising Neighbourhoods*
Cabinet (1st September 2003),
Finance Resources and Equal Opportunities Scrutiny Committee (8th October 2003),
Procedures Working Party (10th October 2003).
- *Review Of Revitalising Neighbourhoods: In Principle Decisions On Area Committees*
Cabinet (24th November 2004)
Council (27th November 2004)
- *Area Committees For Neighbourhood Improvement*
Procedures Working Party (21st January 2004)

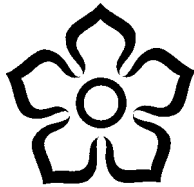
5 Consultations

Consultee

Charles Poole, Service Director – Democratic Services
Peter Nicholls, Service Director – Legal Services
Frances Wake, Committee Services Manager
Andy Morley, Chief Accountant
Resources, Access & Diversity DMT
Corporate Directors' Board

Date Consulted

Jan / Feb 2004
Jan / Feb 2004
Jan / Feb 2004
February 2004
3rd March 2004
9th March 2004



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**AREA COMMITTEES FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD IMPROVEMENT:
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Report of the Corporate Director for Resources, Access and Diversity

Report

1. Background

- 1.1 Following the local elections in May 2003, the new political administration launched a Member led review of the Revitalising Neighbourhoods project. In November 2003, after consideration by the Procedures Working Party and Finance Resources and Equal Opportunities Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet and Council agreed in principle to set up Area Committees to provide better solutions to local problems and improve services by giving some key decision making powers to ward Members, and bringing decision making closer to the public.
- 1.2 This report sets out, for Member agreement, an operational framework for Area Committees and provides guidance for members of Area Committees in the form of a 'toolkit'.

2. The Issues

2.1 Legal framework

- 2.1.1 The Local Government Act 2000 (Part II, section 18) allows for regulations to be made for the setting up of area committees. These regulations are the Local Authorities (Arrangements for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2000. The legislation distinguishes between 'area committees' with delegated functions and budgets, and 'area forums', non- statutory advisory, consultative bodies.
- 2.1.2 Chapter 6 of the Government's Guidance on the Local Government Act, published in December 2000, sets out these arrangements and gives advice on their implementation. Two key points made in the guidance are that:

- *“When deciding whether and how to make such arrangements the principal aim should be to ensure improved service delivery in the context of best value and more efficient, transparent and accountable decision making. The outcome of best value reviews will need to be a particularly important consideration in this respect.” (Para. 6.5)*
- *“The executive should remain, and be seen to remain, accountable for those [delegated] functions as the clear, accountable leadership of the local authority.” (Para 6.15)¹*

2.1.3 Area committees need not be politically balanced (because the responsibility for delegated functions still rests with the executive). They must include elected Members who are members for wards that are partly or wholly contained within the area. They cannot include Members who do not represent wards contained within the area. Members of the executive can also be members of area committees. They can also include voting members who are not representing the authority for some functions (regulation 16A of the 1990 regulations).

2.1.4 Area Committees must not have functions covering an area greater than two fifths of the area of the whole authority, measured either by geographical area or population.

2.1.5 The current Council Constitution allows for the setting up of Area Committees (Article10).

2.1.6 To enable the setting up of Area Committees it will be necessary to incorporate Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure for Area Committees into the Council Constitution. The Terms of Reference for Area Committees set out their powers, roles and responsibilities. The Rules of Procedure cover matters relating to the membership of Area Committees and conduct of meetings etc. These items form Appendix A of the Toolkit, and the Toolkit forms Appendix D of this report.

Recommendation 1

Agree the proposed Terms of Reference for Area Committees and their incorporation into the Council’s constitution.

Recommendation 2

Agree the proposed Rules of Procedure for Area Committees and their incorporation into the Council’s constitution.

2.2 Boundaries

2.2.1 The original boundaries for the proposed neighbourhood forums under Revitalising neighbourhoods were agreed by Cabinet in November 2002 after extensive consultation with Councillors, officers, partners the proposals were endorsed by the Leicester Partnership) and the community / voluntary sector.

2.2.2 In November 2003, Cabinet agreed that all Councillors be given the opportunity to propose final adjustments to the boundaries for Area Committees. It was agreed that any changes would still have to be on the basis of groupings of two to three electoral wards. Should changes be proposed, it was agreed that key partners would be consulted to help inform final decisions.

2.2.3 In January, officers wrote to all Members to seek their views. Two Councillors put forward proposals. Appendix B shows the maps. Cllr. Scuplak proposed a

re-grouping in east Leicester whereby Evington would be grouped with Stoneygate and Coleman wards and Charnwood would be grouped with Spinney Hills. Cllr. Garrity proposed that Knighton be grouped with Stoneygate rather than Castle ward. No alternative proposal was given for Castle, but the only practical solution would be to form a grouping with Spinney Hills. This latter proposal was submitted after the deadline set and as such was not included in the consultation with partners.

2.2.4 Three responses from the consultation with partners were received. These responses are summarised below.

- Yahya Thadha, Leicester Partnership's Community Representative for Spinney Hills and Stoneygate (also representing Muslim Khatri Association) raised a concern that the South Highfields area (part of Stoneygate ward) could suffer if Stoneygate were to be grouped with Evington and Coleman in that the high levels of deprivation in the area could become 'hidden'. He was also concerned that the area could become marginalised in the proposed new grouping.
- Voluntary Action Leicester responded in relation to the impact on Leicester Partnership Community Representatives. They point out that representatives from affected areas will need to be flexible in any dealings they might have with Area Committees as they would be working to different boundaries. However, it was made clear that their primary relationship is with the Leicester Partnership and as such they are not dependant on a relationship with Area Committees.
- Carolyn Clifton, Chief Executive of Eastern Leicester Primary Care Trust (PCT), commented that neither the existing boundaries nor the proposed revision match the PCT's boundaries, although the existing boundaries do form a closer match. In either case, it will be necessary for the PCT and the Council to work flexibly at the operational level to ensure joint working is effective.

2.2.5 Both proposals would maintain a reasonable level of consistency in terms of size of area and population covered by Area Committees across the city. Equally, the number of elected members serving on Area Committees would be within the existing spread. In Option 2, Area Committees would have 7 & 5 members respectively and in Option 3, Area Committees would have 6 members each.

2.2.6 Both proposals would create areas with more uniform populations. While this may have some advantages, it does reduce the opportunity for an Area Committee to bring diverse communities and interests together and at worst there is a risk that minority groups could be marginalised. This may not be the most effective approach if Area Committees are to have a role in promoting community cohesion (see recommendation 10).

2.2.7 It will not possible to accommodate both proposals because they both involve new arrangements for Stoneygate ward.

2.2.8 Members are asked to agree on their preferred option:

- Option 1 - No change
- Option 2 - Evington / Stoneygate / Coleman & Charnwood / Spinney Hills
- Option 3 - Knighton / Stoneygate & Castle / Spinney Hills

- 2.2.9 In November 2003, Members requested that the boundary of the city centre be clearly defined. A map showing a definition for the city centre is included in Appendix B of this report for members' approval. Officers will produce a separate report on city centre issues including the development of a consultative forum.

Recommendation 3

Agree final boundaries for Area Committees and the city centre.

2.3 Phased Introduction of Area Committees

- 2.3.1 In January 2004 the Procedures Working Party expressed its preference for a phased introduction of Area Committees and asked officers to develop a criteria for selecting initial areas for further consideration by Cabinet.

Recommendation 4

Agree whether there will be a phased introduction of Area Committees.

- 2.3.2 The most important consideration when introducing Area Committees on a phased basis is ensuring that the effectiveness of initial Area Committees can be evaluated to inform future decisions about how we develop Area Committees.
- 2.3.3 With this exception, there is no other overriding reason to select particular areas of the city as initial Area Committees.
- 2.3.4 The suggested criteria below are designed to support an effective evaluation of initial Area Committees, with the first point being the most critical:
- Ward Councillors have a commitment to the idea of Area Committees, are keen to act as members of initial Area Committees, and have sufficient capacity to devote to them.
 - To help our learning from the initial areas they should have at least some different characteristics.
 - Initial Area Committees are not concentrated in one area of the city.

Recommendation 5

Agree criteria for selecting 'initial' areas for Area Committees

- 2.3.5 Councillors were given the opportunity to express an interest in being part of phase 1 of the introduction of Area Committees.
- 2.3.6 The outcomes of this consultation are shown at Appendix C, which is set out using boundary option 2 as this is the boundary option that PWP are recommending to Scrutiny and Cabinet.
- 2.3.7 As can be seen from the list at Appendix C, there is no one area where all Members have expressed an interest in being part of phase 1. The areas where there is the highest level of interest are:

- Area 2: Humberstone, Hamilton and Thurncourt, (3 out of 5 Councillors interested)
- Area 3: Coleman, Evington and Stoneygate, (3 out of 7):
- Area 6: Aylestone, Eyres Monsell and Freeman (4 out of 6). and
- Area 7: Braunstone Park & Rowley Fields, Western Park and Westcotes (3 out of 7)

2.3.8 With this level of interest it would be possible to have quorate meetings in all these areas.

2.3.9 The second suggested criteria is that the areas should have different characteristics. Broadly speaking, the characteristics of the four areas are as follows:

Area 2: Humberstone, Hamilton and Thurncourt – mixed housing, open spaces, new housing developments, and older population, low crime and unemployment.

Area 3: Coleman, Evington and Stoneygate – an area of contrast within itself – ranging from relatively affluent, owner occupied households in areas of low crime and unemployment in Evington, contrasting with parts of Stoneygate which have higher rates of crime (burglary), issues around community cohesion, young people and antisocial behaviour.

Area 6: Aylestone, Eyres Monsell and Freeman – covers some of the most deprived areas of the city with poor housing estates, high crime rates (drug dealing), high unemployment and poor performance of children at secondary school.

Area 7: Braunstone Park & Rowley Fields, Western Park and Westcotes – high levels of Council housing in Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields. The area covers the New Deal for Communities scheme in Braunstone. There are high numbers of students in Westcotes. The ethnic majority is white, but with significant levels of people of Chinese or other ethnic group. Theft, particularly from vehicles is a key crime issue in the area. Lower than average performance at secondary school and school exclusions are also a problem. There are problems with pollution and litter around King Richard Road and Western Boulevard.

2.3.10 In summary, these four areas would provide a reasonably diverse range of characteristics.

2.3.11 The third criteria proposed is that the first area committees should not be concentrated in one area of the city. Choosing areas 2, 3, 6 and 7 would under represent the north of the city. Members may therefore wish to consider choosing area 8 or 9 too, but this option would be limited if ward Members in those areas do not wish to be part of phase 1 as our consultation suggests is the case.

2.3.12 Should Members agree to establish initial Area Committees it is intended that they would be up and running in the Autumn.

Recommendation 6

Agree 'initial' areas for Area Committees.

2.3.13 Some local authorities have begun with a limited number of Area Committees. However, a key lesson from those authorities is that this can become problematic if Area Committees are allowed to develop in an ad hoc fashion.

2.3.14 The establishment of an operational framework for Area Committees as set out in this report should help prevent these problems arising. The risk of this potential difficulty arising should also be reduced if any future roll out of Area Committees across the city is planned and informed by a review of the initial Area Committees. It is therefore suggested that initial Area Committees be reviewed after 12 months of operation. Officers will report back to Members with proposals for evaluation, and how future arrangements for Area Committees could be managed.

2.4 Delegated Decision Making

2.4.1 Cabinet agreed that devolved decision making should be one of the primary roles of Area Committees. The Local Government Act 2000 grants Council's the power to delegate both executive and non-executive decisions to Area Committees within certain constraints.

2.4.2 Members also agreed six criteria to decide which Council functions could be appropriate for devolved decision making to Area Committees. Officers have subsequently developed this criteria and an assessment methodology to enable managers to test their service areas against the criteria.

2.4.3 Should Members agree to a phased introduction of Area Committees, it will be necessary to consider the implications of delegating decision making powers to Initial Area Committees. There are no legal or technical reasons why such powers cannot be delegated to a limited number of Area Committees, but there are some potential issues.

- Concerns may be raised that some residents will have a greater say in influencing Council decisions than others.
- There may be some operational management difficulties.
- Granting delegated decision making powers to Area Committees will require additional resourcing, primarily in terms of officer time.

Recommendation 7

If a phased introduction of Area Committees is agreed, decide in principle whether initial Area Committees will have delegated decision making powers.

2.4.4 If Members do want initial Area Committees to have devolved decision making powers the next stage will be to decide which functions should be devolved. Officers from the Project Team will use the criteria to draw up a shortlist of functions that have the potential to be devolved to Area Committees. Managers responsible for these shortlisted functions will then undertake a detailed assessment of their services suitability.

2.4.5 In parallel to this, officers will provide members with detailed advice on the resource implications of Area Committees being granted delegated decision making powers.

2.4.6 The outcomes of these assessments will then be reported to Members in the autumn to enable final decisions on whether to grant delegated decision making powers and if so, which functions to delegate.

2.5 Community Engagement

2.5.1 Cabinet agreed that along with delegated decision making, community engagement would be a principal role of Area Committees. In relation to this it was agreed that all Area Committees would adhere to a set of agreed minimum standards for community engagement designed to promote public involvement.

2.5.2 Drawing on best practice in other local authorities and reflecting the Local Government Access to Information regulations the following minimum standards are suggested. All meetings of Area Committees will:

- Be open to members of the public.
- Be held in venues that are accessible to everyone, including disabled people and meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Notice of the meeting will be posted on the Councils' internet site, in Link magazine and in public places in the areas concerned. The notices will be visually accessible and attractive, and will tell people how to get copies of the papers in community languages.
- All reasonable requests for papers in community languages will be met.
- Papers for the Area Committee meetings will be widely available at least five clear working days before the meeting and at the meeting itself.
- Papers and presentations for the meeting must be in plain language, short, and based on what committee members and the public need to know. More detailed information must be available if requested.
- Copies of papers available to the public must include:
 - Information on how the meeting works and what the different items are for, written from the public's point of view
 - Agenda
 - Reports
 - Minutes of the previous meeting
 - Responses to progress on public questions raised at previous meetings
 - Responses to progress on petitions raised at previous meetings
 - Form for submitting written questions with freepost address
- Committee members and officers must use plain language when talking in the meeting, and any jargon or acronyms should be explained.
- The layout of the room should be designed to allow the public to hear and contribute to the discussion as much as possible.
- Members of the public must be given at least half an hour in which to ask questions of Committee Members.
- Committee members, or officers, will either respond to public questions at the meetings itself or give feedback on progress on the issue at the next meeting.

- Members of the public will be able to submit petitions on local issues to the committee.
- Members of the public will be invited to give their views on all reports and presentations to the Committee.

2.5.3 Recognising that Area Committees will have a life beyond their formal meetings, and that an important element of this additional activity is likely to be consultation with local people, the following minimum standards for consultation are also suggested. All consultation exercises carried out by Area Committees must pass four tests. They must be:

- related to a decision that the Council (or others) intends to take
- competently carried out
- inclusive; and
- used in practice

2.5.4 Further guidance on these issues is available in the 'Toolkit for Area Committees'.

Recommendation 8

Agree the suggested minimum standards for community engagement (public involvement in Area Committees and consultation by Area Committees).

2.6 Other Roles for Area Committees

2.6.1 In November 2003 Cabinet agreed that Area Committees would have seven roles:

- Executive decision making
- Community engagement
- Developing area community plans
- Neighbourhood renewal
- Scrutiny
- Best value and performance management
- Working with local partners

2.6.2 Members are also asked to consider whether an eighth role for Area Committees; *promoting community cohesion*, should be added.

2.6.3 Area Committees could have an extremely important role to play in building the confidence of and sense of belonging within and between communities in Leicester.

2.6.4 Research carried out by the Council in 2003 shows that residents felt that more local activities for local people were needed to help instil a sense of pride in the area.

2.6.5 Area Committees can take a lead role in bringing people together from different communities to learn from each other, share problems and find solutions, as well as to celebrate success.

Recommendation 9

Agree to the addition of 'promoting community cohesion' as an eighth role for Area Committees.

2.7 Guidance

- 2.7.1 A 'Toolkit for Area Committees' is attached to this report at Appendix D. This toolkit is designed to provide a starting point for Councillors to set up and develop effective Area Committees. As the Area Committees develop we will learn more about what we need to do to make them as effective as possible, and we will update the Toolkit to reflect this learning.
- 2.7.2 The toolkit is currently in draft form as it may need to be amended in the light of decisions made on the recommendations contained in this report.

Recommendation 10

Endorse the detailed operational guidance; 'Toolkit for Area Committees'.

3. Resource Issues

- 3.1 In November, Cabinet and Council noted a number of resource issues. Those issues and subsequent developments are summarised below for Members' information.
- 3.2 The only resource dedicated to supporting the establishment of Area Committees during 2004/5 is £50,000 contained within the base budget of Resources, Access and Diversity. This will support the basic administration of Area Committees. This level of resourcing will be adequate should Members agree to a phased introduction of Area Committees, however, it will only provide a minimum level of support if and/or when Area Committees are established across the city.
- 3.3 This level of resourcing for Area Committees will necessitate the withdrawal of secretariat support from the four existing Area Forums in the city. These Area Forums were established as consultative mechanisms at the time of Urban Programme funding (a forum was established in each of the city's 'priority zones'). Since the development of the original proposals for neighbourhood forums as part of Revitalising Neighbourhoods, it has been assumed that clerking support would be transferred from Area Forums to the new arrangements.
- 3.4 However, Members may wish to find additional resources to continue the support for Area Forums. If not, the timetable for the withdrawal of Area Forum support will be determined by the timetable for the introduction of Area Committees.

Recommendation 11

Agree, that unless additional money can be identified, existing Area Forums be given notice of the withdrawal of secretariat support from within Committee Services.

- 3.5 The Project Team, originally established to support the implementation of Revitalising Neighbourhoods, will finish on 31st March 2004. Officers from the Project Team have led on establishing the policy and practical framework for Area Committees. From 1st April 2004 lead responsibility for Area Committees

will pass to Resources, Access and Diversity as part of the department's wider responsibility for the Council's political management arrangements. Additional development support (negotiated in the light of other work priorities) will be provided by the Chief Executive's Office.

- 3.6 Bids for additional financial support through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) have been unsuccessful. As such, no money has been identified to provide 'top-up budgets' for Area Committees.
- 3.7 Officers have carried out Cabinet's decision to discontinue the employment of Neighbourhood Co-ordinators. In other local authorities with Area Committees we have studied there is dedicated staffing support for Area Committees above and beyond committee administration. There is currently no provision for such support within the Council. As things stand, committee administrators will need to identify the appropriate officers to respond to issues raised at Area Committees.
- 3.8 On this basis, there is a risk that the resource available to support Area Committees will be such that they may not be able to live up to Members and indeed, public expectations.

4. Links to other plans and strategies

- 4.1 A number of commitments were made by the Council in relation to the original proposals to take forward Revitalising Neighbourhoods. These include commitments as part of the Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Improvement Plan and the city's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.
- 4.2 Following the decisions made by Members in respect of the issues raised in this report, officers will be in a position to report back to Members on whether these commitments can be abandoned, changed or re-negotiated in the light of the new arrangements.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 If Members agree to the recommendations contained in this report, we will have a sound legal and operational framework for Area Committees in Leicester. This creates a platform from which Area Committees can provide better solutions to local problems and improve services by giving some key decision making powers to ward Members, and bringing decision making closer to the public.
- 5.2 However, the real challenge will come in resourcing Area Committees and actually making them work in the best interests of the people of Leicester. In this respect the proposals can potentially make a valuable contribution to the Council's 'Corporate Direction', not least the strategic priority of improving the environment and well-being of Leicester to make local neighbourhoods places to be proud of.
- 5.3 Making Area Committees work effectively will be a learning process for the whole organisation. We will need to build learning and reflection into the process of developing them, and to act on what we learn.
- 5.4 Officers and Members will need to work closely together over the coming months to ensure that the practical details of how Area Committees work ensures that

they make a real contribution to taking forward service improvement and local democracy in Leicester.