

# CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## ***Committee Report***

Public

Date of  
Meeting:

Thursday 5th September 2002

Title: Area Working Overview & Scrutiny Review

Report of: Town Clerk & Chief Executive

Report  
reference: TC 166/02

Summary:

The Report reopens the debate on Area working in Carlisle by posing four questions that Members may wish to consider before deciding a way forward for this review

Recommendations:

Members consider the questions set out in the report and identify the direction of further work on this issue.

Contact Officer: Jim White

Ext: 7017

1.

## **2. Introduction**

1. Some Members will recall that the former Local Government Reform Working considered the issue of area based working as part of their work on new political structures and the new constitution and indeed Article 10 (Appendix 1) of the City Council's Constitution includes provision for an area based structure. In the light of nearly one years experience of the new

political structures Members may wish to consider again the questions posed the last time this issue was debated.

- What would an area-based structure do?
- How would it operate? – (Roles & Responsibilities)
- What would it look like? – (Areas; Relationships, protocols etc).
- Advantages and disadvantages of area involvement for Carlisle?

## 1. What would an area-based structure do?

1. Before looking at how an area-based structure would work it is important that members are clear about what it would do and what its roles and responsibilities would be. It was clear from Members previous discussions on this issue that they saw some clearly identifiable roles for are based working including:-

- Consultation and involvement for local people and Members on local issues
- Local Community Planning
- Informing and co-ordinating activity within the area
- Supporting the representative role of the councillor
- Advisory/consultative role for the Executive and Overview & Scrutiny Committees
- Consultee on Best Value Reviews
- Distributor of community based grants
- Commissioner and manager of community based projects

***Are these the right roles for an area-based structure?***

***Are there any other roles that could be undertaken by an area-based structure?***

## 1. How could it operate

### Key Relationships and Protocols

1. Many of roles identified above are currently the responsibility of the Executive and clearly the Executive/Council and would have to consider which if any Executive functions it would wish to delegate to an area based structure.
2. The working group when it previously considered the issue felt that for the area based structure to be a success members of the Executive would also need to be involved at an area level. To ensure objectivity the working group considered this would mean that executive representation should be from members whose constituency was not within the area involved. This of course would not preclude a member of the executive attending meetings in their capacity as a representative of the area involved.
3. The consensus of Members when they previously debated the issue was that any area-based structure would be at its most effective if it had a mandate to work between a wide range of people and organisations and the Executive. It was also felt that to be a success the dialogue should be two way, encouraging debate between people and organisations area structures and the Executive.
4. Acting as a facilitator between the Executive and local people and organisations was seen as a key role. For this to be effective it was felt that any area based structure should engender a sense of ownership this would be assisted by not only having a budget and "teeth" but also through transparent decision taking by both the area structure and the Council/Executive. It was felt that providing clear reasons for decisions would help ensure that local people and organisations remain engaged and that the area based structure was working with them and on behalf of them.

***What would the relationship be between an area-based structure and other Council structures?***

**2. External Relationships**

1. It is clear that to be credible and effective any area based structure would need to engage with all appropriate groups within an area, examples include
- o County neighbourhood forums

o Parish Councils

o Resident and Tenant Groups

o Police

o Schools

***Are there any other external groups with which an area based structure should engage?***

1. One of the key relationships would be that with the County Councils Neighbourhood Forums as Members will be aware the some Forums have been in existence for some time and clearly a further area-based structure could create duplication and be confusing for the public. It is therefore important that there is clarity about the role and purpose of County Neighbourhood Forums and its relationship with any area based structure promoted by the City Council. The City Council Recently appointed a former County Council Neighbourhood Development Officer to manage the Raffles SRB project. The officer, Georgina Ternent, who has experience of working with Neighbourhood Forums both in Carlisle and in other parts of the County, has offered to talk to the Committee about her experience of Neighbourhood Forums.

**1. Advantages and disadvantages**

1. Whilst there may be clear advantages to area based working at the same time it is recognised that there are difficulties. Some of the advantages and disadvantages are set out below.

Advantages	Disadvantages/Challenges
Closer to the people	Same people involved
Could bring together local/people	Managing expectations but must be seen to be successful not a "talking shop"
Resources can be concentrated	Forum overload "another group"
Role for non –executive members	New skills for Members and Officers
Involving local people/groups in debates	Needs to be issue driven
Improving communication	Will receive both positive and negative feedback

***Can members identify further advantages and disadvantages to an area based structure?***

**2. Conclusions**

1. Clearly there are a number of other issues that will need to be considered before any recommendations can be made. The most fundamental of which are area based structure appropriate for Carlisle and if so what would the appropriate scale and coverage of such a

structure. The answers to these questions is probably best left to be considered once some of the above questions and issues have been debated. However it would be helpful if Members were to indicate where they felt further work needed to be done

***Members are asked to identify any matters relating to area based structure on which they wish to see further information and reports.***