



# COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## *Committee Report*

### Public

**Date of Meeting:** 18th January 2007

**Title:** DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT BEST VALUE REVIEW: UPDATE

**Report of:** Dave Taylor

**Report reference:** OS 01/07

### **Summary:**

This report provides an update on progress in implementing the Action Plan developed as part of the Best Value Review of Democratic Engagement.

### **Recommendations:**

That the Committee:

- (1) Comments on progress;
- (2) Considers whether it is now appropriate to cease reporting progress to the Committee

**Contact Officer:** Dave Taylor

**Ext:** 7245

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

## **1. Introduction**

This report details progress with implementing the Democratic Engagement Best Value Review Action Plan. The Best Value Review was completed nearly three years ago. The Committee last received a report in November 2005 and agreed that full monitoring would cease thereafter.

## **2. Key Points**

Although the vast majority of actions in the Action Plan had been completed in November 2005, there has continued to be progress with some elements of the Action Plan (Appendix 1). There remain a very small number of actions within the Action Plan that have not been completed. Members will be aware that Carolyn Taylor (joint lead officer on the review) has now left the City Council.

Progress since the last report to Committee includes the following:

- Training in report writing is now available as part of the Employee Enhancement programme – 7 managers attended the course in 2005/2006 and a total of 23 employees are booked on it in 2006/2007;
- The format of the State of the City debate is due to be reviewed by the Communications Unit in January 2007;
- A Consultation Database has now been set up for use within the City Council and there are also consultation pages on the website which are updated with the latest consultations and details of how to obtain the results;
- The results of Citizens Panels are fed back to the people on the panel in the subsequent covering letter. In early 2007, a newsletter will be sent to inform panel members how the City Council has used the results;
- A Members' Resource Centre has been established on the ground floor of the Civic Centre. This room has been fitted out with a PC, telephone and other furniture. A new library of current information is now in place and this will be expanded and monitored to ensure that the information is kept up to date.
- When more extensive publication of Members' email addresses was considered previously, it was not proceeded with. With the recent upgrading of the website, and the inclusion of e-mail addresses for Members, it may now be an appropriate time to consider whether adding Member's e-mail addresses to published information (eg Focus) would be appropriate.

- A political speed dating event for young people was held successfully in 2006 and is now to be repeated annually to coincide with Local Democracy Week.
- From the youth panel work, a number of 'Taking Action Groups' (TAGs) emerged, where young people selected an issue that they felt was relevant and important, and tried to take action to tackle it e.g. the Anti-Bullying group made a film about bullying in and out of school, presented it to a group of peers and mentors and have produced a DVD and action pack which will be distributed to schools and youth clubs in the city and beyond.
- The Carlisle Diversity Partnership has been developed – this is a cross agency partnership of public and voluntary agencies which is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and preventing discrimination in the Carlisle area. Level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government has been met and it is hoped to achieve Level 2 by 2008/9.
- "Being a Councillor" has been published and is now in its second print run. It has gone out to the political groups to pass on to prospective candidates for the May 2007 elections. Good feedback has been received on this publication from this year's intake of new Members.

### **3. Conclusions and Recommendations**

As detailed in the last report to the Committee in November 2005, the work detailed in the Action Plan is now, in the main, complete.

It is recommended that the Committee:

- Comments on progress;
- Considers whether it is now appropriate to cease reporting progress to the Committee.

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
1. Democratic engagement should be a priority for the Council	To increase the number of people who feel they can influence decisions about their local area	1) Portfolio Holder nominated democratic engagement champion	People feel included/ involved in what happens in their community, contributing to social inclusion	The Leader	None	By April 2005	Executive	Cllr Judith Prest, Sustainable Communities Portfolio Holder
		2) Business planning process to identify how services can contribute		Directors	To be undertaken using existing resources	By March 2005	Directorate Plans through SMT and O&S	Now incorporated into Directorate and Service plans
2. Members of the public should be better engaged in official meetings	To encourage more people to attend and engage in official meetings of the Council	1) Undertake a review of agendas/ minutes/ forward plan/ reports	People understand the democratic process	Ian Dixon	To be undertaken using existing resources	By March 2005	Committee Services Team Plan	Complete for O&S. Ongoing review of format of reports which will consider whether report template facility in CMIS can be made use of.

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
3. The Council needs to be more innovative in its approach to public meetings	To attract a wider audience to participate in local democracy	2) Pilot an open question session at start of Full Council	Meetings are more accessible	Jo Osborne/ Ian Dixon	To be undertaken using existing resources	By July 2004	Committee Services and Comms Team Plans	Not carried out.
		3) Have name- plates for Members at all public meetings	Members are better known	Ian Dixon	To be undertaken using existing resources		Committee Services Team Plan	Done
		4) Provide training for officers in report writing	Reports are more easily understood	Linda Mattinson	Training Directory	2005/06	Strategic Staff Developme nt Group	Report writing now available as part of Employee Enhancement Programme
		1) Introduce a 'Question Time' style debate at a venue away from the Civic Centre and involving other organisations	More people will be involved in local democracy	Jo Osborne	To be found within existing budgets	Six months after the 'State of the City' address	Citizens' Panel	Format of State of City debate and any follow up event to be reviewed in January 2007

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
4. The level of communication about meetings of the Council needs to be improved	To enable people to have access to democratic process and Council decisions	2) Ensure the 'State of the City' debate takes place every year	Adherence to the Constitution	The Leader	Discussed at Strategic Financial Performance Group May 2004	Annually from July 2004	Community O&S	Held October 2004, October 2006. The format of the State of the City debate will be reviewed in January 2007.
		1) Make agendas and minutes accessible over the internet	More people will be able to access information about the Council, meetings and decisions when it suits them	Ian Dixon	Committee Management System to be installed	By December 2004	Committee Services Team Plan	Committee Management System now available over internet.
		2) Add more text to website about workings of the Council		Jo Osborne	To be undertaken using existing resources	By September 2004	Communica tions Team Plan	Done

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
5. The quality of consultation must be improved	To make consultation an effective part of the decision- making process	3) Promote meetings with topical interest on website, through local media and Carlisle Focus	People will not suffer consultation fatigue as consultation will be better co- ordinated	Jo Osborne	To be undertaken using existing resources	Ongoing	Annual readers' survey in Carlisle Focus	The O&S Improvement Plan includes measures to further promote meetings
		4) Pilot the web- casting of meetings		Jo Osborne	£13,000	Year-long pilot starting July 2004	Annual readers' survey in Carlisle Focus	Started October 2004, equipment lost in flood. No new initiatives planned.
		1) Consultation incorporated in each Business Plan		Directors	To be undertaken using existing resources	March 2005	Directorate Plans and Team/Servi ce Plans through SMT and O&S	

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
		2) Ensure feedback is given to those consulted		Jennifer Williams	To be undertaken using existing resources		Citizens' Panel	Newsletter with feedback now sent to Citizens Panel members
		3) Ensure regular evaluation of consultation		Jennifer Williams			Corporate Consultation Strategy	Services now provided by CN. Evaluation incorporated into review of CN contract (March 2007)
		4) Promote a range of consultation mechanisms		Jennifer Williams			Directorate Plans and Team/Service Plans through SMT and O&S	
		5) Set up a consultation data base		Jennifer Williams				Done



Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
		6) Create a new page on website with results of previous consultations and allow people to register to take part in forthcoming exercises		Jennifer Williams			Citizens' Panel	Done
		7) Introduce Corporate Consultation Strategy, monitor effectiveness		Jennifer Williams			Review 12 months after launch of strategy	Policy introduced. Review now part of the CN contract review (March 2007)

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
6. Members need support to enable them to carry out effectively their role as community leaders	To provide Members with information and training to help them do their 'jobs' better	1) Produce a Best Practice Guide for Surgeries	The public will get a better service from well-trained and well-informed Members	Nicola Mitchell	£1,000	By March 2005	Survey Members and Surgery users 12 months after publication	Now produced and circulated.
		2) Improve the current referral system	Improvements in service through increased use of system	Ian Dixon/ MSOs	No staffing implications. Possible costs depending on improvements required			Political parties content with existing referral system – no changes made.

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
		3) Provide administrative support to political groups		Ian Dixon	Funding for three part-time Member Support Officers in place	In post from April 2004		Member Support now part of Legal and Democratic Services. MSOs now full-time until March 2007
		4) Provide research support to Members		Nicola Mitchell	To be undertaken within existing resources	In post from April 2004	Review performance with Group Leaders.	Ongoing

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
		5) Directors to feed information about ward issues into a central point		Maggie Mooney and Jason Gooding	To be undertaken within existing resources	Ongoing	Annual survey of Members	Supplied through Members' briefing and MSOs' regular bulletins
		6) Improve Members' Briefing to include more information about forthcoming issues		Jo Osborne	Funding identified in 2004/05 budget	By September 2004	Annual survey of Members	Ongoing
		7) Investigate the creation of a Members' Room in Civic Centre		David Williams/ Ian Dixon		As part of the review of Civic Centre accommodation	Community O&S	Members Resource Centre now established
		8) Introduce a Members' Development programme		David Williams	Members Learning and Development Programme	Launched June 2004	Members Learning and Development Steering	Established

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
		9) Organise open days for Members in each Business Unit		David Williams	To be undertaken within existing resources	2004/05	Group Members Learning and Development Steering Group	All Business Units had open days before restructure.
		10) Investigate more extensive publication of Members' email addresses in Carlisle Focus and elsewhere		Jo Osborne/ Nicola Mitchell	To be undertaken within existing resources	By October 2004	Survey of Members	Investigated but not proceeded with.
		11) Make a list of Members searchable by postcode on the website		Web Development Officer	To be undertaken within existing resources	By October 2004	Readers' survey in Carlisle Focus	Done

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
7. The Council needs to engage more effectively with young people	To encourage more young people to become involved in local democracy	12) Provide more information about individual Members on the website and through the new Customer Contact Centre	Young people feel included/ involved in what happens in their community	Nicola Mitchell	To be undertaken within existing resources	By March 2005	Citizens' Panel and annual reader survey in Carlisle Focus	Done
		1) Develop, with partners, an Action Plan to create opportunities for young people to be engaged in the decision- making process		Rob Burns		By September 2004	Community Support Team Plan	Ongoing
		2) Introduce Citizenship packs into schools		Jo Osborne		By December 2004	Communica tions Team Plan	Issued during Local Democracy Week October 2004 and still available

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
		3) Include youth-based features in Carlisle Focus		Jo Osborne	To be undertaken within existing resources	Ongoing	Readers' survey in Carlisle Focus and survey with Youth Panel	Ongoing
		4) Develop the youth-based sector of the website		John Nutley	To be undertaken within existing resources	Ongoing	Website-based survey	Ongoing
		5) Appoint youth champions in Business Units to ensure policies are youth-proof	Youth Issues at heart of the decision-making process	Maggie Mooney/ Jason Gooding	To be undertaken within existing resources		Business Plans through CMT and O&S	Not progressed
		6) Develop more formal links between the Council and the Youth Panel		Rob Burns	To be undertaken within existing resources	By October 2004	Community Support Team Plan	'Youth Panel' work now replaced with 'Taking Action Groups' (TAGs)

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
		7) Youth Panel to develop Young Mayor and other Local Democracy Week initiatives		Jo Osborne/ Rob Burns	Undertaken within existing staff resources. Funding subject to future budget bids	2006/2007	Feedback from participants	Youth Panel no longer operating. Political Speed Dating will be held annually to coincide with Local Democracy Week.
		8) Pilot an Attainers Event to introduce first time voters to the authority		Jo Osborne	£1,000	April 2004	Feedback from attendees	Poorly supported so not being pursued
		9) Incorporate 'Youth Issues' into the title of a Portfolio Holder	Encourages community involvement and improves existing links	The Leader	To be undertaken within existing resources	May 2005	Community O&S	Not proceeded with.



Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
8. The Council must engage with all groups as effectively as possible	All minority groups have access to Council services and information	10) Explore how Members can be helped to forge links with schools in their wards	Reduces duplication of consultation and helps target hard to reach groups	Nicola Mitchell	To be undertaken within existing resources	By April 2005	Community O&S	Part of Member Learning and Development Programme
		1) The Council to play an active role in the Cumbria Diversity and Equalities Group	A more representative local authority for the people of the District	Carolyn Curr	To be undertaken within existing resources	Ongoing	SMT and O&S	Ongoing. Also, the Carlisle Diversity Partnership has now been set up.
		2) Achieve Level 1 of the CRE (Council for Racial Equality) Standard		Carolyn Curr	To be undertaken within existing resources	By April 2005	SMT and O&S	Now achieved. Aiming for Level 2 by 2008/2009 (Equality Standard for Local Government).

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
9. The turnout at elections is poor	To increase proportion of electorate registered to vote	3) Community Involvement and Regener- ation Officers to develop links between Community groups and Council	Delivery of good practice electoral services	Rob Burns	Within existing resources	December 2004	Community Support Team Plan	Ongoing  Parish Charter has been reviewed (overseen by Community O&S). Specific rural pages are being developed on website and a quarterly rural newsletter is now published.
		4) Review the information flow to Parish Councils		Claire Rankin	Part of the Parish Democracy Programme	Ongoing	Review of Rural Strategy	
		1) Investigate piloting different voting systems		David Mitchell	To be undertaken within existing resources	Opportun- istic.	Community O&S	

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
		2) Promote registration and voting	More accessible information to potential electors	David Mitchell	£3,000	Annually in April and September	Through Register of Electors and Voting Returns	
		3) Investigate with estate agents and house builders ways to boost rolling registration	Create partnerships between Council and outside agencies	David Mitchell	Investigation completed within existing resources. Any recommendations to be resourced via budget bids	By March 2005	Directorate Plans through SMT and O&S	New properties now being targeted through direct mailing
		4) Adhere to outstanding aspects of ODPM good practice	Make the voting process easier/ more accessible	David Mitchell	To be undertaken within existing resources		Directorate Plans Through SMT and O&S	Electoral Administration Act will lead to the Electoral Commission setting performance standards within the next 12 months

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
		5) Investigate redesign of voter registration form	Better information to electorate	David Mitchell	Investigation completed within existing resources.  Any recommendations to be resourced via budget bids	By March 2006	SMT and O&S	Revised statutory form now specified in Regulations.
		6) Investigate possibility of including more relevant information on polling cards	Provision of alternative/ easier ways of registering to vote	David Mitchell	Investigation completed within existing resources. Any recommendations to be resourced via budget bids	By March 2006	Directorate Plan through SMT and O&S	Poll card wording now specified in revised statutory election rules

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
		7) Investigate different methods of promoting elections and registration	Electoral system simplified for electors. Potential savings to be re-directed to service provision	David Mitchell	Investigation completed within existing resources. Any recommendations to be resourced via budget bids	By March 2005	Community O&S	
		8) Investigate on-line registration		David Mitchell	Investigation undertaken within existing resources. If implemented, cost of £1,000 to be identified	By September 2004	SMT and O&S	On-line registration for unchanged households during autumn 2006 canvass

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
		9) Re-consider decision to elect by thirds each year	Potential to increase turnout	John Egan	Potential savings of £140,000 over two years by reducing number of elections from three to one in each four-year period. Savings on staff time	2007 – not less than 10 years from previous Council resolution on electoral cycle (statutory provision)	Community O&S	New provisions In Local Government Bill will Address this
		10) Encourage candidates for local elections through information on website	Attract a wide range of potential candidates	Jo Osborne	To be undertaken within existing resources	By March 2006	Track nominations for candidates through applications	Not completed.

Finding	Objective	Action	Outcome/ benefits for local people	Lead	Resource implications	Timescale	Monitoring/ evaluation	Comments Jan 2007
		11) In conjunction with political parties, offer workshops on 'being a councillor'		David Williams	Member Learning and Development Programme	Programme launched June 2004	Member Learning and Development Programme Steering Group	"Being a Councillor" published and given to political parties for distribution as appropriate