

**Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee
15th March 2006**

TAKING FORWARD THE VOICE TO CHOICE PROJECT

Purpose of Report

1. To consult the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on the further development of the Voice to Choice project.

Background

2. Overview and Scrutiny hosted a seminar on proposed developments for new governance arrangements on 13th January 2006. Presentations were made by John Thomson, portfolio holder for Staffing and Community, and Nicola Bacon from the Young Foundation; they set out the national and local context for reviewing our current framework for public engagement, including options for influencing, monitoring and making decisions at the local level.
3. Thirty-eight Councillors (78%) attended the seminar, and their issues and concerns were noted. Following the seminar the Overview and Scrutiny Committee accepted the recommendations for continuing with the process for developing new local arrangements. In the meantime, discussions have continued with the District Councils, Chief Officers, service managers and the Listening to Communities Board. Research has also been carried out with Parish Councils. Various documents have been developed to help take the project forward and these continue to be work in progress as they are discussed and refined with the input of our partners, members and officers. These documents are included as appendices for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to help further the development of the project.

Main Considerations

4. The implementation of the Voice to Voice Project aims to improve the following:
 - Clearer community leadership roles, reducing tension between unrepresentative and unaccountable individuals and legitimately elected and accountable representatives
 - Efficiencies saving for services requiring ongoing consultation and public engagement mechanisms
 - Greater transparency so that citizens know how they can influence the provision of local services, who has made decisions and for what reasons
 - More effective partnership working that reduces duplication and concentrates effort
 - Meetings that interest and engage local people on key issues
5. The idea of a local Community Area Board has been developed and a draft terms of reference for such a board are attached (Appendix A). There are currently three options for how a Community Area Board might be constituted:
 - Area board or forum with advisory and consultative role
 - Area committee with decision making powers exercising executive and/or non-executive functions:
 - Joint arrangements, including a joint committee with decision making powers exercising executive and non-executive functions

Appendix B provides more detail on the requirements and implications for each of these options that Overview and Scrutiny are asked to consider.

6. Further work with services is ongoing, particularly in relation to Appendix C which broadly describes the indicative areas of service and functions which a Community Area Board might address. More detailed discussions will be held with the Council's service managers and our partners to look at this menu of services and the scope for local influence further and to also take into account questions such as:
 - Are there existing arrangements for consultation which the proposals would substitute for, and possibly improve?
 - Would the proposals raise any special issues regarding governance?
 - Would the service lend itself to delegated decisions and/or delegated funding?
 - Would the proposals raise special issues about performance management?
7. A draft agenda for 'Wiltsbury' has also been prepared (Appendix D), based on the menu of services and provides an example of the sort of business a community board might choose to deal with, possibly with some standing items and others that may appear at regular intervals. Success of these meeting will depend upon the agenda determining what is important locally and ensuring that the meetings are conducted in a way in which people can easily access, avoiding over formality and high levels of bureaucracy.
8. Evaluation criteria for the project has also been drafted (Appendix E) and, given its role in monitoring the project, Overview and Scrutiny is asked to consider the indicators which are listed and to advise on others which may need to be developed, or any further refinements to this criteria.

Recommendations

9. It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee:
 - Comment on the detailed proposals for the Community Area Boards (Appendix A), including the preferred options for the constitutional arrangements (Appendix B) and the menu of services (Appendix C)
 - Put forward any further observations or recommendations about how the Voice to Choice project should be implemented and comment on how the Community Area Boards might operate (Appendices C and D)
 - Agree the role the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee will have in future monitoring of the Voice to Choice project and determine whether or not the evaluation criteria (Appendix E) fits this purpose

Dr. Ray Jones
Director of Adult & Community Services

Report Authors: Niki Lewis, Assistant Director 01225 713180, Julie Martin, Policy and Community Officer 01225 858816, Ian Gibbons, Head of Legal Services 01225 713052

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:
None