

Community safety and Community Services Select Committee

11th June 2009

Report of the Director of Adult Community and Housing Services.

Community Renewal Service – an update on the Duty to Involve

Purpose of Report

1. To update the Select Committee on the new “Duty to Involve” local persons and their representatives in the activities concerned with changing or improving services and their delivery and how the Community Renewal team in working with partners is facilitating some of this work in communities and neighbourhoods.

Background

2. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 extended the statutory duty to involve people in the provision of health services, to those services provided by the Local Authority and it builds on the existing consultation and engagement mechanisms already available.
3. The new duty came into force on 1 April 2009, and seeks to ensure that people have greater opportunities to have their say. It requires local authorities to take appropriate steps to involve representatives of local persons.
4. Statutory guidance issued in July 2008, gives more detail concerning the interpretation of the legislation and notes that
 - “Local persons” refers to those likely to be affected by, or interested in, a particular function of the authority. It is not limited to local residents, but covers people who work or study in an area; visitors; service users; local third sector groups; businesses; parish councils; anyone else likely to be affected. It applies to children and young people as well as adults.
 - “representatives of local persons” means a balanced mix of the above” and specifically does not refer to elected members
5. It advises that councils may involve their communities in one of three ways :
 - providing information
 - consulting – formal consultations, satisfaction surveys, focus groups etc
 - Involvement – the most interactive form of engagement, giving people greater influence.

6. The guidance advises that consideration should be given to providing opportunities for communities to :

- influence or directly take part in decision making
- provide feedback on decisions, services, policies and outcomes
- Work with the authority in designing policies and services, e.g. as part of the drive to improve skills and reduce worklessness or to address crime and antisocial behaviour.
- Carrying out some aspects of services, e.g managing a community centre or taking responsibility for a park ;
- assessing services, e.g. user evaluations, 'mystery shoppers'

It stresses that feedback to the community should make it clear how the input of these representatives has affected/contributed to subsequent decisions.

7. Extension of the duty

The Community Empowerment White Paper announced that the duty to involve will be extended to other agencies, including Jobcentre Plus, Youth Offending Teams, Regional Development Agencies, the Chief Officer of Police and Police Authorities, and the forthcoming Homes and Communities Agency. The extension of the duty is covered in the new Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill.

Under the auspices of Dudley Community Partnership, a joint strategy for community engagement has been adopted with some common principles which feed into the engagement strategies for the various agencies that make up the partnership including the Council.

8. The Community Renewal Strategy

Members of the select committee are reminded that the Community renewal strategy sets out a series of principles and an overview of general direction. This includes

- a recognition of the principle of coordination of strategies and activities to address community needs and issues
- an appreciation that involving communities achieves better and more sustainable outcomes – national evaluations have shown that this to be the case
- Bringing together partner agencies and communities in a shared approach
- Addressing deprivation so that no one is excluded or disadvantaged by who they are or where they live

9 Area Committee Community Renewal Plans

The Area Community Renewal Officer is responsible for producing an Area Committee Community Renewal plan and working with local communities and agencies to identify objectives and community issues for the plan - the overall direction is via the Area committee

The Area Community Renewal Officer co-ordinates, facilitates and focuses the work of partner agencies onto community and neighbourhood issues as defined by data analysis, community engagement and elected members. This is done through a variety of partnerships, including PACTs, local environmental groups,

community forums etc. brought together to tackle particular issues and to develop a continuous dialogue with communities in relation to their area.

Community renewal business is organised locally to ensure that community groups, local people and their elected representatives are engaged with service providers in deciding what needs to be done and are enabled to act upon this in neighbourhoods and localities.

Information and examples

10. From points 5 and 6 above members of the committee will note that much of the work of the community renewal team is about “Involvement” to give people greater influence.
11. This is done through a variety of mechanisms; an interesting example is that of the newly developing North Dudley Community Renewal Forum –particularly aimed at involving local community representatives in the Community Renewal working group for North Dudley area committee. Examples of other mechanisms where local persons and their representatives *may influence or directly take part in decision making* are: the Castle and Priory Area Regeneration Board, the Lye and Wollescote Partnership, the Netherton Regeneration Strategic Group, the Shell Corner Partnership, Caslon Community Partnership.
12. Joint working between Community Renewal, Dosti and the Planning division has enabled the development of a Statement of Community Involvement in Planning to a *provide feedback on decisions, services, policies and outcomes*
13. The Area Committee Community Renewal plan brings together top down and bottom up approaches to addressing local needs and aims to arrange with elected member input, what is needed to make various service strategies complement each other and mean something for local communities. I.e. the Area Community Renewal Officer enables local people and their representatives to *Work with the authority in designing policies and services, e.g. as part of the drive to improve skills and reduce worklessness or to address crime and antisocial behaviour.*
14. This is particularly pertinent in the 5 City Strategy wards, where Area Community Renewal Officers coordinate both local service providers and communities in addressing worklessness. Interestingly this is defined by local communities as “lack of access or availability of well paid local jobs” and by the public agencies as “people dependant on benefits”. It has led to an emerging strategy of addressing barriers to work and skills deficits as well as local brokerage with the underpinning value of sustained employment.
15. The Community Renewal Officers work in partnership with the neighbourhood policing teams to deliver and support the PACTs by involving local people in the identification of issues surrounding crime and antisocial behaviour and in developing local community safety actions – this has led to a variety of responses from the development of the Youth Task force, the Early Intervention programme, an Environmental task group, a nominated neighbours scheme and the delivery of a variety of voluntary youth diversionary activities
16. This ties in directly with another aspect of the statutory guidance under the duty to

involve ;*carrying out some aspects of services*; Community Renewal actively engages communities in taking responsibility and adding value to public services and this ranges from managing a community centre, running a football team , clearing a pond or taking responsibility for a park ;

Finance

- 17 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report

Law

18. The Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on local authorities to establish a local strategic partnership to address collaborative working and develop a community strategy and local neighbourhood renewal strategy. Neighbourhood management is part of that approach.
Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1980 enables the Council to do anything which is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social and environmental well being of the area
Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act places a duty on Public authorities to consider Community safety in the carrying out of all its functions
The Local Government and Involvement in Public health Act places a duty on public authorities to involve local persons and their representatives in the functions of the authority.

Equality Impact

19. The objective of Community Renewal is to promote inclusion and social cohesion. Community renewal plans target those most in need in terms of deprivation where lack of equality because of poverty is an issue.
Information is collected through each CR intervention or consultation to monitor the inclusivity and difference of various groups and people involved. Where inclusion is an issue ACROs engage through various community groups of interest groups locally to design appropriate responses to different circumstances

Where children's and young people are involved they are directly consulted and frequently design the response to local issues.

Recommendations

- 20 That members of the select committee note the information and the work of the community renewal team to support the duty to involve.



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List of Background Papers

Area Committee Community Renewal Working Group papers

PACT minutes, NESP action plans and minutes, Project evaluations