

# **Improving community Councils- Outcomes of the Review**

## **Introduction**

A year ago the Council instigated a review of Community Councils. The meetings had been running for three years and the Council wanted to take a step back and examine their value and usefulness to local people and to make sure that they were fit for purpose.

## **Consultation**

The Council asked Ipsos MORI to support the review. One of their tasks was to undertake some in-depth consultation. They met representatives from our partners such as the Police, Primary Care Trust, and the Voluntary and Community sector as well as Cabinet Members, frontline councillors and senior Council officers. They also organised some discussion groups to get the views of local people. These groups reflected the local diversity of the borough and included attendees of Community Councils and non-attendees, as well as Community Council Chairs.

A questionnaire was then put together using the information on the issues that had emerged from the first stage of the consultation. Everyone who had attended a Community Council in the previous year was invited to complete this.

## **Findings and Outcomes**

As is often the case with community engagement there was a broad range of views. These had to be considered alongside other factors that Ipsos MORI were investigating such as recent changes to legislation, best practice examples from other boroughs and the way in which Community Councils contribute to the Council's overall approach to listening to local people. Set out overleaf are some of the findings that are most relevant to people who attend meetings. These show what the issues were that emerged from the consultation and what the Council has done to address them.

## **More information**

This paper only briefly outlines the review process, findings and outcomes. If you would like more information please contact:

Claire Witney  
Community Engagement Unit  
Room 101, Town Hall  
Forest Road, Walthamstow,  
E17 4JF

Tel: 0208 496 3000  
Email: [Claire.Witney@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:Claire.Witney@walthamforest.gov.uk)

Issue	Outcome
As some Community Councils are held in the same place for every meeting there is not equitable access by all residents. This may discourage new attendees and undermines the association and relevance to residents of the 'local' nature of Community Councils.	Community Council meetings will be rotated to ensure that meetings are held in all of the wards of a Community Council area whenever possible.
The separation of the Community Forum and the Area Committee present a number of issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages residents to leave after the Community Forum</li> <li>• Confusing/complicated format for attendees</li> </ul>	The Community Forum and Area Committee should run concurrently or a more seamless transition be implemented The meetings will be scheduled to end at 9.30pm to encourage residents to stay for the full length of the meeting Guests such as Safer Neighbourhood Teams and Council officers will be asked to stay to the end of the meeting.
The lengthy minutes and use of jargon discourage community participation and alienate new attendees	Reduction in the length of minutes by only recording issues that are not responded to at meetings. Capturing the general flavour of the debate and the feeling of the meeting towards issues whilst ensuring that they are purposeful and businesslike.
Important local issues that arise through Community Council meetings are not fully explored and the community are not always involved in the solutions. Traditional, formal style meetings deter potential attendees	Community Councils adopt an event style meeting once or twice a year. The open forum would be maintained but the agenda would cover a particular theme such as housing, recycling, health, or schools and could involve inviting different services and agencies to manage stalls or make small presentations.
The role of the Cabinet Champion as observer has had limited impact.	The role of Cabinet members will be to attend meetings and particularly themed meetings when they are asked to respond to portfolio issues.
Issues that have proved contentious with local people are often raised at Community Council meetings. Currently there is no relationship that maximises community engagement opportunities with the Scrutiny process.	Relationships with the Scrutiny function are developed to ensure that community engagement through Community Councils informs policy development and will also identify issues for Scrutiny.
Community Councils should aim to constantly widen attendance and ensure that positive outcomes are widely fed back to the community	The website and WFM are used more proactively to publicise Community Councils and feedback (more swiftly) the positive outcomes and responses to issues that are raised at meetings and the general flavour of the debate captured through the new style of minutes