

STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 9
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Report of the Neighbourhoods and Empowerment Manager

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NEIGHBOURHOOD COUNCIL PROGRESS REPORT

1. PURPOSE

To provide the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the progress of Neighbourhood Councils so far in order that the Committee can provide input into their continuing development

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee are asked to scrutinise an update on the progress of the newly formed Neighbourhood Councils and make any necessary recommendations.

3. LINKS TO SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

Neighbourhood Councils are contributing to the empowerment and citizenship agenda, which underpins the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement.

4. BACKGROUND

Neighbourhood Councils have now had two full rounds of meetings with a third in progress.

The December meetings included a consultation item on the Medium Term Financial Strategy, and an initial, interactive session on Community Action Planning. The usual open session was also on the agenda during which the public were invited to raise any issues or concerns of their own.

The initial allocation of £25K for each Neighbourhood Council was also announced, although it was stressed that this is only unlocked when a community action plan is in place. Following internal discussions it has been agreed that any further funding made available to Neighbourhood Councils will also be unlocked (i) only when a community action plan is in place, (ii) where there is a proven demand for that resource to be made available, and (iii) spent against some form of menu-based approach to purchasing services beyond an agreed core.

5. KEY ISSUES

There are a number of key issues already identified that require improvement to maximise the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Councils

- Neighbourhood Council meetings need to be more dynamic, informative, interactive and relevant
- Agendas should focus on feedback from previous meetings and open debate sessions and discussion
- There should be visually impactful content using mapping and photographs
- There should be time before the meeting set aside to display items of public interest

- New approaches to marketing Neighbourhood Councils need to be considered to boost public attendance and give clarity over the differences between Neighbourhood Management and Neighbourhood Councils.
- There should be some targeted marketing work, highlighting the differences between the roles and responsibilities of Neighbourhood Councils, Neighbourhood Panels and Parish Councils
- Agendas, Minutes and associated paperwork should have less jargon and be more accessible
- The Neighbourhood Council meetings should be less officer, more Member led

These points and any others raised by the Scrutiny Committee will form part of the ongoing development plan for Neighbourhood Councils.

6. IMPLICATIONS

It is expected that applying the scrutiny process to Neighbourhood Councils will help to make them well attended, accessible to all members of the community, and will be an effective vehicle to drive forward community plans.

7. CONSULTATION

Consultation has taken place with the Corporate Management Team, Democratic Services, Media and Communications and the Neighbourhood Management teams and there have been some suggestions for prospective improvements.

8. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

It is anticipated that Members will discuss the above suggestions, provide challenge to the process developed, and offer further suggestions for alternative measures.

9. NEXT STEPS

Following discussions at the Scrutiny Committee, any comments and recommendations will be taken forward as part of the ongoing development of Neighbourhood Councils and the next round expected in early summer.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

None

11. APPENDICES

None