

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	The Cabinet
2.	Date:	30th April 2014
3.	Title:	Area Assembly & Area Assembly Coordinating Group Meetings
4.	Directorate:	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

A consideration of the Area Assembly and Area Assembly Coordinating Groups Terms of Reference and Article 12 of the Council's Constitution has recently been undertaken with Area Assembly Chairs and the individual Area Assembly Coordinating Groups. An update was provided to Area Assembly Chairs meeting on 20th January, which set out a number of proposed changes. The proposed changes set out in this report reflect feedback from Area Coordinating Groups and the Area Chairs meetings held in September and November 2013 and at the meeting held on 20th January 2014.

This report provides details of the proposed changes and identifies the next steps in progressing this matter.

6. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- **Note the contents of the report and the proposed next steps to progress this matter.**

7. Background

In January 2011, a report was presented to Cabinet which detailed the outcome and recommendations of the review of the Neighbourhood Partnership Service. The proposed operational changes arising from the review were approved by Cabinet and implemented in February 2011. Cabinet also supported the need for the new partnership team to have the capacity and flexibility to:

- Undertake wide ranging area based needs assessments and translating them into action focussed service plans.
- Providing support and stewardship of local communities, and directly influencing housing, environmental and community safety agendas, making it easier to get things done.
- Promoting civic participation and supporting local democratic processes
- Becoming a critical element of integrated locality based services. In seeking to address these issues, consultation took place with Area Assembly Chairs and Area Assembly Coordinating Groups which included a review of the Area Assembly Terms of Reference and Article 12 of the Council's Constitution. This was to determine what, if any, changes should be made to reflect the new operational arrangements within the Area Partnership Team and ensure that the objectives set out above were realised.

Discussions with Area Assembly Chairs and Coordinating Groups has recognised that some of the work Area Co-ordinating Groups used to oversee is now taking place in other forums, for example through Community First Panels or Deprived Communities coordinating meetings. However, the extent of this varies in each area depending on the areas priorities and the number of other forums within a particular area.

It was recognised that in view of this changed dynamic, it would perhaps be beneficial to have a more flexible approach to partnership and meeting structures, which are relevant to and meet the needs of each Area Assembly area.

The proposed changes which arose from this consultation process are set out below. These were recently reported to the Area Assembly Chairs meeting on 20th January and revisions have made based upon feedback received.

The proposed changes seek to:

- Enable greater decision making and empowerment at a local level.
- Enable Area Co-ordinating Groups to review and develop their membership and convene based on local issues and requirements within their areas.
- Sustain links with disadvantaged communities activity, Community First and other area based initiatives

- Sustain coordination of area based activity and delivery of outcomes
- Support initiatives to address major issues such as Welfare Reform and increasing capacity within the voluntary and community sector and the community at large.

7.1 Recommended changes to Article 12.

Numbers refer to the relevant sections in Article 12. The current wording is quoted with the recommended changes set out thereafter.

(3) Area Assemblies shall meet at least 6 times a year at publicised locations within the areas they cover

Recommended change: Area Assemblies shall meet at least 4 times a year at publicised locations.

This is to enable flexibility in terms of meeting venues to be used and in order to enable cost savings to be generated where possible.

(6) The Co-ordinating Group shall comprise the 9 Elected Members for the Electoral Wards within the area, 6 representatives of partner organisations and 3 community representatives.

Recommended change: The Co-ordinating Group shall comprise of the 9 Elected Members for the Electoral Wards within the area, representatives of partner organisations and community representatives.

It is proposed that individual Co-ordinating Groups will have the flexibility to determine who and how many partners/community organisations will sit on the group. Also, that partners/community organisations will be invited on to the Co-ordinating Group as appropriate in line with the Group's Area Plan/priorities. This would give the capacity to co-opt different partners to reflect the critical issues at that time. Co-opted members could remain part of the membership subject to the agreement of the group.

7.2 Recommended changes to Terms of Reference

Numbers refer to sections in the Terms of Reference. The current wording is quoted with the recommended changes set out thereafter.

(3) The role of the Area Assemblies shall be to:-

- Encourage access and participation from local residents in the democratic process;
- Develop a single Area Plan for the Area Assembly that is recognized by all agencies operating within the area;
- Set local delivery targets and monitor progress towards these targets;

- Review the impact and co-ordination of Council policies and services and those of other organisations who deliver services in the areas which the Assembly covers;
- Consider issues of local concern and to submit reports to the relevant Cabinet Member, Cabinet, Scrutiny and Rotherham Partnership on these;
- Comment on issues referred by Cabinet, the relevant Cabinet Member, Scrutiny and Rotherham Partnership;
- Indicate views on a range of issues which require local consultation;
- Receive and consider the report of any Task and Finish Group set up by the Co-ordinating Group and determine any appropriate action.
- Consider funding proposals for the expenditure of devolved budgets submitted to the Area Assembly by the Co-ordinating Group

Recommended change: remove 'single Area Plan' and replace with 'develop partnership Area Plans where required as identified by the Co-ordinating Group'.

Recommended change: remove 'set local delivery targets and monitor progress'. Add in 'Work with community and voluntary organisations to ensure their involvement in local decisions and where possible to increase their capacity to deliver within their community'.

(4) Area Assemblies shall hold public meetings at least six times a year at publicised locations within the areas they cover. Such meetings shall be attended by the elected Members, representatives of other public bodies, voluntary and commercial organisations operating within the area (whether or not represented on the Area Assembly Co-ordinating Group) and members of the public

Recommended change: Area Assemblies shall hold meetings at least four times a year. The format and dates for these meetings to be decided by each Co-ordinating Group.

(6) The Co-ordinating Group shall comprise:-

- The nine elected Members for the electoral wards within the area.
- Six representatives of partner organisations.
- Three community representatives.

Recommended change: Replace with:

The Co-ordinating Group membership shall comprise the 9 Elected Members for the Electoral Wards within the area. Co-optees will be identified by the Co-ordinating Group on an annual basis, based on local needs identified through area planning processes.

- (8) The six representatives of partner organisations shall in all cases include a representative of South Yorkshire Police, 2010 Rotherham Limited, NHS Rotherham and where applicable a Parish Council representative to be chosen by the Parish Councils within the area. These representatives and the elected Members shall jointly appoint the remaining representatives of partner organisations.

Recommended change: Delete this paragraph. See recommended changes to (6) above.

- (9) The three community representatives will be appointed by the elected Members and the representatives of partner organisations following public advertisement within the area, for a term of four years.

Recommended change: Replace this paragraph with:-

‘Co-optees will be appointed by the elected Members and the representatives of partner organisations following public advertisement within the area, for a term of one year. A co-optee who wishes to continue as a member of the group after his/her term of office has expired may, with the agreement of the co-ordinating group, extend his/her representation for a further year. The post does not need to be publically advertised’.

- (10) The Co-ordinating Group may co-opt representatives of other partner organisations or community representatives for such particular projects or periods of time as the Co-ordinating Group shall determine.

Recommended change: Replace this paragraph with;

‘The Co-ordinating Group may co-opt other representatives for such particular projects or periods of time as the Co-ordinating Group shall determine, subject to the approval of the Chair of the Co-ordinating Group’.

- (11) Meetings of the Co-ordinating Group shall be held at least six times a year. A quorum must include at least three of the elected Members of the Co-ordinating Group and at least three other members of the Group.

Recommended change: Meetings of the Co-ordinating Group shall be held at least twice per year.

Recommended change – a quorum must include at least three elected members and at least 1/3 of the remainder of the Group.

The quorum must remain as 3 elected members, but the recommendation changes the partners/ co-optee member attendance from a specific number to 1/3 of the remainder of the group. The Chair or Vice Chair would still need to be present to hold the meeting. Please note that Standing Order 22 (2) requires at least 3 members to hold a meeting which is a committee of the Council.

(12) Substitute Members are not permitted at meetings of the Co-ordinating Group. If a partner representative or community representative fails to attend the Co-ordinating Group for three consecutive meetings, then the Co-ordinating Group shall consider the reasons for non-attendance and may appoint a replacement partner or community representative as the case may be.

Recommended change: Change the terms “partner representative” and “community representative” and replace with the term “co-optee”.

(14-21) Area Assembly Devolved Budget Procedure.

Recommended change: remove attachment, but not reference to the budget. The procedure is outdated and is no longer relevant. New procedures will be drawn up specific to any allocated future budgets. Reference to the devolved budget to be retained to allow capacity for Co-ordinating Groups to administer any devolved budgets in the future.

(23) The Area Chairs shall meet at least six times a year together with the Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods who shall Chair each meeting.

Recommended change: The Area Chairs shall meet quarterly.

7.3 Voting Rights

It was proposed during the consultation that all members of the coordinating group should have voting rights. There was concern that co-optees would not engage with the process fully if they did not have voting rights. One Co-ordinating Group acknowledged benefits of accountability of elected members if they had sole voting rights. However, the value of co-optees was also recognised. The consensus was that partners and community representatives should have voting rights.

7.4 Next Steps

Legal Services have been consulted and have advised that changes can be made subject to Cabinet approval and ratification by full Council on 6th June 2014.

8 Finance

There are no immediate financial issues arising from the report.

9 Risks and uncertainties.

There are no immediate risks arising.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The proposed changes enable greater local flexibility to work effectively with partners and communities in addressing issues such as Deprived Communities agenda, Community First, neighbourhood management and promoting community resilience and engagement with the voluntary and community sector.

11. Background Papers and Consultation.

Cabinet, 19th January 2011, Minute No: 148

Area Assembly Chairs Meeting – 16th September 2013, Minute No:8

Area Assembly Chairs Meeting – 11th November 2013, Minute No:16

Area Assembly Chairs Meeting – 20th January 2014, Minute No: 26

Area Assembly Coordinating Groups – meetings in September/October 2013

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board - 21st March 2014

Legal Services have been consulted and have advised that changes can be made subject to Cabinet approval and ratification by full Council on 6th June 2014.

**Contact Name: Paul Walsh, Housing & Communities Manager, x 34954,
paul.walsh@rotherham.gov.uk**