

Area Working – A Stronger Role for Area Committees?

In July 2010, following debate at Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, the Leader of Cambridge City Council agreed that the Council should set up a pilot in the north of the City from April 2011 to explore a more participatory approach for area committees.

Since July officers and elected Councillors have visited other local authorities to see how they approach local participation and local decision making. These visits informed 2 workshops in October attended by elected Councillors, officers and partners including the police and county council officers.

During the workshops participants put forward ideas and considered options for the pilot that could increase local participation in local decision-making. There was lots of discussion about the kind of decisions that might be better taken locally in area committees, where it is easier for local residents and groups to have more of a say, instead of centrally within the Guildhall.

Participants also discussed whether more decisions made by other public sector organisations, such as the County Council, might be taken within area committees where they related to local issues.

Participants also discussed other ways of engaging with local people who might not want to attend more formal area committee meetings. These included options such as holding less formal meetings where Councillors sat with local residents on tables rather than at the front of the meeting room. They also discussed whether more radical options could be used such as area committees using social media like 'Facebook' to engage with younger people and people who are less mobile.

Officers will be presenting a report to the City Council's Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Committee in January. This report will recommend a framework and specific options for the pilot and propose changes that could be made to all area committees without waiting for the pilot to run its course. The report will also need to consider how resources such as staff time can be re-focused away from the administration of central committees to support a stronger role for area committees.

In the mean-time, we are interested to hear the views of local people and local groups.

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