

Area Initiative Review – Area Board Chairs / Co-opted Members
5th March 2007, Peel Room, Bury Town Hall

Comments / actions from the meeting:

- Ensure all attendees are invited to the June Community Conference
- Ensure all attendees are sent notes from the Round Table discussions
- Ensure all attendees are sent copy of the PowerPoint presentation
- Consultation period should be longer
- Suggestion that this be put on the Area Board Agendas
- Suggestion that there should be extraordinary meetings of the Area Boards to discuss this issue
- Still work to be done to excite people about involving the community
- Greater clarity needed to explain proposals to people who attend Area Boards
- Could the final decision be made following the June Community Conference
- What happens if the political ruling group changes?
- Would have been better if groups had been arranged by separate Area Board

Table 1

- Co-opted members – what's the use?
- Little time in this meeting and little notice
- No report back of similar meetings in the past
- Does it need changing?
- No explanation of why changes (better response if people were informed)
- Will “one to one” consultations be minuted, the same as with public question time?
- Open Forum – people need to voice concerns in public
- But allow for a choice of surgeries
- Possible smaller areas to meet in between area board meetings (as with “TRAC”)
- Better consultation for major topics eg youth issues / children's centres with co-opted members and community members
- Quarterly meetings would be lip service and not timely to consult
- Another meeting to be held with all comments from today made available before decisions have been made and then taken to Area Boards before decision is made (possibly one item agenda)
- Longer / simpler / clearer / less jargon / lay person explanation
- Feel that not all regular attenders have been invited today
- All comments to be available from this meeting to all
- Who will decide who the community and organisation reps are?
- Not averse to change but keep the good bits – so public not to have less of a say ie more democracy, not less

Table 2

General

- Too little time for consultation
- Grass roots consultation over too short a period
- Feels like rubber stamping
- Would like details of household survey referred to in presentation
- Area Boards suffer from lack of publicity
- Need to ask whether the Area Boards as currently comprised are working
- Positive point - Area Boards are a way of finding out what's going on in the area
- Positive point – the ability to ask questions in an open forum
- Acknowledged that certain issues are best raised outside the meeting
- Negative point – that the proposals might put more distance between the public and elected members

Issue of Chairship

- Positive point – rotating Chair, having member of the public as Chair a good idea
- But important point is that Chair should be strong and knowledgeable
- Skills of Chair critically important
- Contrary view that the Chair should be the responsibility of the councillors – rotating between councillors each year

Issue of Consultation

- Single issues should be discussed at separate meetings – school closures, hospital closures
- A road scheme proposal is a good example of an issue that should be presented to the public
- Meetings should be information sharing not rubber stamping
- Business issues should be dealt with in a sub group context not at the main meeting
- Area Boards remain as an information sharing group
- Area Boards can be intimidating
- Proposal should result in improved participation
- General lack of knowledge about Area Boards
- Should stop issues being raised that don't have a local relevance

Links between LAP and Council / LSP

- Danger of being drawn into a private sector dominated meeting
- Concern around lack of public involvement at ATT's
- Needs accountability – reporting should feed both ways

Community Membership

- Important that process is open

- Concern over councillors selecting community representatives

Open Forum / One to One Consultation

- Important to have an open forum
- Councillors already have surgeries so why have more?
- Contrary view – it would be a positive for the meetings to have additional councillor surgeries
- Important to distinguish between important and less important issues eg lack of street lighting in general a relevant point to raise whereas reporting a defective street light should not be raised in open forum
- Suggestion that questions for open forum be submitted in advance
- Point made that there is a variance in effectiveness across existing Area Boards

Frequency of Meetings

- Meetings should be held in the evening

Suggestions for Improvement

- Should deal with more strategic issues as well as local concerns
- Area Boards have become too “comfortable” – should revert to theatre style meetings
- Structure of open forum – questions to be submitted in advance
- Quality of Chair – very important
- Councillors should sit at the head of the table
- Any individual member of the public should be able to bring up any issue
- A positive development would be to develop Area Board sub groups
- Sharing responsibility between councillors and community members viewed as positive
- More publicity should be given to the meetings
- Meetings should be better minuted and with standing orders in place
- Meetings should be “open”
- People should be allowed to speak as often as possible

Table 3

- Open forum essential
- Too many presentations in current system – clogs up the business of meetings
- No trust in one to one proposal – public accountability is what current Area Boards offer to the public
- Area Boards in current format not effective – clogged up with trivial issues
- Current Area Boards all work differently – tonight we should have been split into each Area Board for feedback as well as being jumbled together

- Not all Area Boards are not working – residents should be able to improve their own if that one isn't working. Successful Area Boards should be an example to others
- One person cannot represent the public on an issue
- Individuals do not have strategic issues, they have individual issues
- Some items at Area Boards are really too trivial for the meetings eg blocked grids whilst other issues are overlooked due to lack of time
- Not enough time for councillors meetings / surgeries before the meeting
- Area Boards alert the public to important issues that may otherwise get lost in individual surgeries
- Area Boards get numerous individuals into a room frequently to discuss issues – when / where else does this ever happen? This is democracy
- Why was only one person in the room tonight surveyed regarding the residents survey re Area Boards
- The Chair should be independent? - but who would be unbiased really
- Some people think Chair should remain an elected member
- If the plan is for a business meeting with public observing the meeting – who would attend? The answer is very very few
- Public have the right to raise an issue – best done in open forum
- Have the open forum and for those who do not want to speak publicly there should be a form for people to fill out before the meeting
- What feedback are we going to be given after this meeting?
- This all feels pre-determined – so what is the point of bringing us into this discussion at this point?
- The initial concept of Area Boards was to get local reps to represent the views (co-optees) of local people in spending of money – this has not happened as co-optees cannot vote
- Do we retain the Kickstart budget under the same format as now in the proposed new scheme?
- Why is it already being called a LAP and not “Area Boards”?
- Area Tasking Teams will deal with what and who will chair those meetings if it is extended out, who has all the info?
- Area managers? Service providers already have managers and service targets and objectives – who will be the final voice? – the service manager with national targets or local manager reacting to complaints

Area Board Chairs

- Need to have a more in depth discussion (special Area Board Chairs meeting)
- Chair should be a democratically elected member
- The way it is being managed is giving the perception that we are replacing Area Boards not improving them (fixing something that is not broken)
- Chair has to have the knowledge and experience to chair a meeting and give an informed response to questions
- Not opposed to rotating chair it has worked well in the SRB 5 programme
- Common view that they were not opposed to vice chair from community
- May need to consider co-opted members getting travelling expenses
- How would the surgeries be managed if a delegation turned up

- Feel that Area Board Chairs should be allowed to attend the full ATT meeting
- The consultation is being rushed should rearrange the report submission date to Executive
- Should consider the devolvement of resources
- Officer are not dealing with issues raised at Area Board or in the Local Community Plan because they say they clash with already agreed priorities so what will change