



# **Surrey County Council's Local Committee in Epsom and Ewell**

## **Review of Local Committees**

**29<sup>th</sup> September, 2003**

### **KEY ISSUE**

To inform Members of the progress made in the review of Local Committees.

### **SUMMARY**

When Local Committees were established, it was agreed that they should be reviewed after one year of operation. Surveys and focus groups have been conducted to gather evidence and views about the effectiveness of Local Committees and the conclusions have now been reported to the 'How the Council does its business' group of County Councillors which is overseeing the review. The Group has commissioned some additional work and will report to the Executive in due course.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Committee notes the recommendations of the Review of Local Committees and receives further reports on how relevant recommendations can be taken forward locally.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Members will recall that in June this year they received a questionnaire about the success or otherwise of the Local Committees as an institution and also acted as a Focus Group to discuss the number of questions about the effectiveness of Committees in engagement, considering local performance and spending locally determinable funds. The results of these and other data sources have been brought together into a report to the 'How the Council does its business' group. The full report runs to more than 20 pages but key recommendations are reproduced in this report to give the Committee a flavour of the issues raised.

1.2 In relation to the scope of Local Committee activity and influence, the group felt that the Executive should identify some new functions that Local Committees could undertake on their behalf and that Local Committees should raise the profile of non-transportation activity to restore some balance to the public perception of what they do. In all of their activity, Local Committees should seek to operate in a way which allows a much greater interaction with public and partners, but without compromising the processes necessary for effective operation. This would be helped by reinforcing with service officers the need for straightforward and locally relevant reports which should be considered in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. However, the Executive should consider further, in consultation with local committee chairmen, what role the Local Committees should have in seeking to secure local service improvements, with a view to subsequently providing greater clarity for Members and service managers on this matter.

1.3 It was suggested that Local Committees use a more open and effective process to track actions arising from Local Committee decisions, and ensure they are undertaken promptly. The Executive should consider whether they wish to provide guidance to Local Committees as to how far district/borough members should be encouraged and permitted to participate in the non-transportation part of the committee's agenda as practice in this area seems to vary across the County. Nevertheless, it was also recommended that Local Committees should continue to extend their partnership relationships with local partners with an aim of increasing the number of joint reports, where appropriate, and that more joint working and joint reporting with the districts and boroughs is encouraged. The group welcomed the strategies Local Committees are using to become more accessible and inclusive and support the increased use of flexibility in venues and timing to attract more people to attend and recommended that the Executive endorse them.

1.4 The Group felt that it was important that more work is done on formalising the relationship between the Local Transportation Service and Community Support Teams so that the rules, boundaries and responsibilities are clear and agreed, and that the process for arbitration is clarified so that issues can be dealt with as they arise.

1.5 It was recognised that there is a need for much greater use of publicity, both at a strategic and local level, to make the public more aware of the existence

of Local Committees and Local Committee meetings. The Executive considering whether it would be appropriate to look at a more memorable name for local committees could help this.

1.6 With regard to resources, Local Committees should continue to effectively manage their current budgetary responsibilities and look for ways to align more closely with the boroughs/districts over local issues including renewing an invitation to them to bring their common issues, joint reports and budgets to the table. The Executive should continue to provide local allocations for members.

1.7 Where the Executive is influenced by the views of a Local Committee on a particular issue on policy, this should be noted in the Executive minutes. At the same time, officers preparing policy papers with local implications should be invited to obtain a steer from Local Committees earlier in the policy development process.

## **2. CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

2.1 Overall, the report considered by the 'How the Council does its business' group is supportive of local committees and its recommendations suggest a continuing and increasingly influential role for them. However, the group recognised the local committees themselves need to be proactive in engaging with the public to make the most of their proximity to the communities they serve and do all that they can to make their meetings and other activities open, transparent and welcoming.

2.2 The group particularly stressed the role of the Local Committee in creating and supporting partnerships with a range of organisations but especially with the Boroughs and Districts.

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<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Mike Howes Local Director	020 8541 7930
<b>Contact Officer :</b>	Kirsty Light Local Support Officer	020 8541 7062

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**Background Papers:**