

REPORT TO: POLICY COMMITTEE ON 30 APRIL 2008

SUBJECT: LOCAL AREA COMMITTEES

BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To further consider the establishment of local area committees, their role and remit, membership and resourcing implications.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section A 42 of the Council's Administrative Scheme relating to ensuring that the organisation, administration and management processes are designed to make the most effective contribution to the Council's objectives.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee considers the establishment of local area committees on the basis outlined in this report.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council at its meeting on 26 March 2008 approved (para 27 of the minute refers), in principle, the establishment of local area committees subject to a further report on the detailed remit and resourcing issues being submitted to this meeting of the Policy Committee.
- 3.2 It has been recognised that existing community planning structures have been very successful in bringing public and voluntary agencies and bodies together to consider priorities for public service delivery in Moray. With the development of the single outcome agreement it is important that the Council establishes structures which fully involve elected members at every level and ensures that there is clear political and democratic leadership within the community planning process. It is also important to ensure that there are clear links with service delivery at the local level and that structures link to the priorities set out in the single outcome agreement.
- 3.3 The Council at its meeting on 26 March 2008 considered the establishment of eight local area committees – each based on a multi-member ward. It was recognised that the proposal would be a first step in the decentralisation of some elements of Council business. The aim being to strengthen local members' influence over the planning and delivery of local services and giving them a key role to play in community leadership and overseeing community planning at the local level. It is considered that this can be achieved through the development of local area committees which actively participate with both the community and local professionals and stakeholders in strategic planning, decision making and delivery of local services.

3.4 It has already been proposed that each of the Committees would be led by local elected members and that meetings of the local area committees would be held in local communities and could move around to ensure coverage of the new multi member ward areas.

3.5 This paper will now further consider :-

- The role and remit of local area committees
- Role of local area committees in community planning
- The resourcing of local area committees
- Staff support to local area committees
- Timetable for meetings

3.6 **ROLE AND REMIT OF AREA COMMITTEES**

The draft remit of area committees was covered briefly in the report to the Council meeting on 26 March 2008. That report acknowledged that the full remit of local area committees had yet to be defined but it was envisaged that the remit would cover :-

- Each Committee developing an area community plan which would aim to bring together strategic issues and local priorities and provide a means of influencing public agencies and the Moray wide Community Planning process;
- Seeking the active involvement of Community Councils, Local Forums and Community Associations.
- Local scrutiny of services in associated school group area
- Providing local members with support, information and analysis for the local area
- Identifying local expenditure priorities and targeting of resources at a local level
- Development of locality budgeting

3.7 Having briefly reviewed how area committees work in other local authority areas, Members may consider it appropriate that the following matters also fall within the remit of area committees in Moray :-

- Monitoring the effectiveness of Council services in the Area; reporting findings to Council or Policy and Resources committee.
- Approving expenditure on local services where delegated to local area committees
- Reviewing revenue and capital spend estimates for the Area, making recommendations to relevant service committees.
- Determining various licensing and similar functions otherwise delegated to officers where there are objections or intention to refuse an application.
- Administering common good funds and local trusts relevant to the local area
- Appointing their own Chair
- Focusing on delivery of agreed outcomes in respect of priorities in local area plans

- Scrutinising trends in relation to issues of interest and concern and developing locality profiling
 - Extending local area plans to include agreed targets and outcomes
- 3.8 A summary of the proposed remit is detailed in **APPENDIX 1**.
- 3.9 Other issues which became apparent during the review of committees in other Council areas were that it was considered beneficial if :-
- Agendas did not only contain items requiring a decision but also included papers for information and discussion, and that
 - It should be made simple for Councillors in a multi-member ward to put forward an item for discussion at an Area Committee meeting.
- 3.10 The monitoring and scrutiny of service delivery at the local level is seen as a key role of Area Committees. It will be beneficial if Area Committees are able to ensure that the Council is delivering services to agreed standards within their Area. Further work will, however, be needed in some areas to collect performance information at the area level and to develop the reporting by area of those activities for which it would be meaningful to do so.
- 3.11 It is proposed that monitoring and scrutiny, initially at least, should be focused on the delivery of services and targets which relate to the finalised Single Outcome Agreement.
- 3.12 **ROLE IN COMMUNITY PLANNING**
Area Committees are a point of contact with communities and local organisations, particularly Community Councils, Local Forums, Community Associations and Tenants Forums. They also have the potential to ensure that services are meeting the needs of local communities in an integrated way and contribute to the delivery of the single outcome agreement.
- 3.13 They should also have the potential to act as a focus for community planning at the local level. They have the capacity to be an important element in the on-going process of public engagement and consultation and it is considered that the Council should seek to use the Area Committees to facilitate dialogue with the public whenever appropriate. They have the capacity to ensure that the views of all sections of the community are considered when reviewing local priorities.

- 3.14 It is proposed that each Area Committee annually reviews a local community plan that sets out local aims, priorities and future aspirations. It will be important to ensure that there is a clear link between this plan and the single outcome agreement - this will be an opportunity to identify issues at an area level which require to be addressed if the Council is to meet its obligations to deliver local outcomes.
- 3.15 Locality / Area Management Teams should meet periodically with their Area Committee as a way of further underlining the importance of the Area in the Council's governance arrangements. The role of locality teams needs further development but it is anticipated that a cycle would be established which covers:-
- Considering and reviewing local priorities against the single outcome agreement
 - Setting targets for local outcomes
 - Scrutinising performance against agreed indicators
 - Reviewing trends in relation to targets
 - reporting to the Local Area Committee
- 3.16 Currently, officers from Local Community Networks focus on children's services at the local level and local workers groups support the work of local area forums. It is proposed that these operations be reviewed in order to ensure that local area teams can be created in the most effective way possible to support local area committees.
- 3.17 **RESOURCING ISSUES**
When considering the budgets which would appropriately be overseen at the local level, there are a number of issues that require to be taken into account;-
- 3.18 Some budgets are already distributed to a local level e.g. a large percentage of the Educational Services budget is already devolved to schools.
- 3.19 Some budgets are allocated on a basis of need across the Council area e.g. Social Work aim to deliver services locally on the basis of individuals needs rather than an allocation to individual areas – any variations in the delivery of social services according to which Area the service users happened to live in is unlikely to be sustainable.
- 3.20 Some budgets are allocated on the basis of risk to the Council; over the whole Council area e.g. roads and bridge maintenance budgets.

- 3.21 There are, however, a number of budgets where expenditure reflects local priorities and it would be appropriate for local area committees to scrutinise and influence expenditure programmes in these areas e.g.

Community Safety

Visitor Centres

Maintenance of local halls

Maintenance of leisure facilities and playparks

Grounds maintenance

Local Community Networks

Local improvements — it is suggested that each local area committee would be allocated a capital budget of £20,000 for local priorities.

- 3.22 It is also envisaged that a budget would be delegated to the committee in order that local services and priorities can be funded.

- 3.23 There are other areas of spend where it is considered that it would be beneficial to decentralise control and accountability to a local level such as devolved childrens services budgets where local area committees could have a valuable role in scrutinising and influencing local programmes. This proposal will require further development but Educational services are already planning to devolve responsibility and accountability for expenditure to locality teams.

- 3.24 It is also apparent that there may be potential to devolve responsibility for other areas of expenditure to area committees. Decisions have still to be taken as to how elements of the Fairer Scotland Fund will be allocated and controlled and there may be a role for local area committees in this respect.

- 3.25 In this respect, it is worth noting that in authorities where area committees exist a simple division of financial resources between areas has been considered inappropriate. It is recognised that there is an inherent tension between providing a consistent standard of service across the Council area and local decision-making. Delegation of resources to areas will require to take into account some assessment which ensures that resources are allocated according to need.

3.26 STAFF SUPPORT TO LOCAL AREA COMMITTEES

If a local area structure is to be established then it will be important that it is adequately resourced and supported.

- 3.27 It will also be important to ensure that the area committee system is effectively managed. At this point, it is envisaged that the structures will take some time to establish and operate to their full potential. When fully operational, it is estimated that two Area Managers would be required to oversee the administration and the working of the local area committees. It is envisaged that an Area Manager would have responsibility for overseeing the production of Area Plans and gaining Committee approval for them. Area Plans should be produced/ reviewed annually and should link with Community Planning

and the Single Outcome Agreement and service plans. Area Plans will be structured according to the themes in the Community Plan and will set out local priorities and future aspirations.

- 3.28 Area Managers would also be responsible for production of a regular information bulletin for Councillors keeping them up to date with services in their area.
- 3.29 It is envisaged that, as a minimum, each local area committee would require to be supported by an Area Manager, a local area committee support worker and a committee officer, (recognising that such a resource can be shared by more than one committee).
- 3.30 It will be important that support staff are familiar with local issues, have a good working relationship with local Councillors and can bring local issues to the attention of the Corporate and Departmental Management Teams.
- 3.31 Committee officers will be responsible for creating and publishing agendas, the clerking of the Committees and production of accurate decision sheets and minutes.
- 3.32 Initially, it is proposed that:-
- One Area Manager be appointed to oversee the work of area committees
 - the current team of three forum workers be supplemented by a further member of staff and that these four workers will support the work of the local area committees.
 - Two assistant committee officers be appointed in training positions to supplement the Committee Services section.
- 3.33 Job descriptions for the Area Manager and local area committee support workers are included at **Appendix 3**.
- 3.34 It must also be appreciated that the future direction of the work of the Committees is difficult to quantify at this stage and that the support staffing will require to be kept under review .
- 3.35 It has already been proposed that each of the local area committees should link directly to one secondary school and its associated school group area which aligns to the management and staffing arrangements for Educational Services, Social Work, Health, Police and Fire and Rescue Services.**(Appendix 2)** This would provide the Committee with access to professional staff support for the local area. It is recognised, however, that due to the differing boundaries between Wards and Associated School Groups that Local Area Committees will also require access to information from neighbouring ASG's where services and establishments are based within their ward.

3.36 TIMETABLE FOR MEETINGS

It is important that local area committees act as the local arm of community planning and that their work links to the community planning themes and the single outcome agreement.

3.37 One way of achieving this is for one community planning theme to feature at each meeting in order that there could be discussion and identification of local priorities and issues which should be taken into account in developing community plan priorities. This would logically lead to a need for five meetings per year of each of the local area committees.

3.38 It is envisaged that Area Committees would meet in the evening – and Wednesday evening meetings are suggested. The timing can be considered when the Committee timetable is reviewed.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Development Plan/Community Plan/Service Improvement Plan

The proposals in this report will ensure that community planning structures have the capacity to deliver on the commitment to a single outcome agreement.

(b) Policy and Legal

Formation of local area committees has the capacity to deliver on the Council's obligations to both deliver community planning at a local level and produce a single outcome agreement which takes account of local priorities. The proposal also moves the Council ahead in terms of the Government's community empowerment agenda.

It will be necessary to revise the Council's Administration Scheme and Standing orders to reflect the establishment of local area committees

(c) Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)

While staff are aware that the development of local area committees is under discussion it will be necessary to formally consult with Trade Unions over the change in role of forum workers. The gradings of posts will be established by personnel based upon the enclosed job descriptions.

The four year financial plan which will be considered by the Council on 14 May 2008 includes budget provision of £200,000 to establish, resource and service a local area committee structure.

(d) Consultations

The Corporate Management Team have been consulted in the development of these proposals and senior staff in the Corporate Policy Unit, Educational Services and Community Learning and Development have been consulted in the development of the report.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1** The establishment of local area committees is the first step in decentralising some elements of Council business. These Committees will strengthen local members' influence over the planning and delivery of local services and give them a key role to play in community leadership and overseeing community planning at the local level.
- 5.2** This is a significant change in terms of community empowerment and local accountability and it will be necessary to closely monitor the operation of the Committees and their development. The support staffing arrangements will require to be kept under review dependent upon how budgets are devolved to the local level and the volume of business which local area committees deal with.

Author of Report: Alastair Keddie
Background Papers: None
Ref:

APPENDIX 1

Local Area Committees – Draft Remit

The local area committee will :-

- Appoint their own Chair
- Seek the active involvement of Community Councils, Local Forums, Community Associations and Tenants Forums.
- develop an area community plan which would aim to bring together strategic issues and local priorities and provide a means of influencing public agencies and the Moray wide Community Planning process;
- Scrutinise delivery of services within the local area
- Monitoring the effectiveness of Council services in the Area; reporting issues or concerns to Council, Policy and Resources Committee or the relevant service Committee.
- Identify local expenditure priorities and targeting of resources at a local level
- Approving expenditure on local services where delegated to local area committees
- Reviewing revenue and capital spend estimates for the Area, making recommendations to relevant service committees. (it is recognised that formation of local area committees will be a first step in the development of locality budgeting for services)
- Determine various licensing and similar functions otherwise delegated to officers where there are objections or intention to refuse an application.
- Administer common good funds and local trusts relevant to the local area

Committees will :-

- Be supported by officers within the associated school group area
- Provide local members with support, information and analysis for the local area

APPENDIX 2

WARD	WARD NAME	ELECTED MEMBERS	ASSOCIATED SCHOOL GROUP
1	Speyside Glenlivet	M. McConachie F. Murdoch P. Paul	Speyside High
2	Keith and Cullen	G. Coull S. Cree R. Shepherd	Keith Grammar
3	Buckie	J. Mackay G. McDonald A. McKay	Buckie High
4	Fochabers Lhanbryde	A. McDonald G. McIntyre D. Ross	Milnes High
5	Heldon and Laich	J. Hogg E. McGillivray D. Stewart A. Wright	Lossiemouth High
6	Elgin City North	B. Jarvis J. Russell M. Shand	Elgin Academy
7	Elgin City South	J. Divers G. Leadbitter J. Sharp	Elgin High School
8	Forres	L. Bell J. Hamilton I. Ogilvie I. Young	Forres Academy