

REPORT TO CABINET

REPORT OF: SCRUTINY OFFICER

REPORT NO: DLS 33

DATE: 4th APRIL 2005

TITLE:	LOCAL AREA ASSEMBLIES
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COUNCIL AIMS/PORTFOLIO HOLDER NAME AND DESIGNATION:	Councillor Linda Neal Leader
CORPORATE PRIORITY:	Access
CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS:	There are none arising directly out of this report
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT IMPLICATIONS:	LAA Agendas and minutes are subject to Freedom of Information Act provisions
BACKGROUND PAPERS:	Minutes of Local Area Assembly Meetings – January/February 2005

1. The second round of Local Area Assemblies has now been completed. The first round of meetings took place in August September 2004, the second in January/February 2005. As there have now been two rounds of meetings, the time is considered to be right to review their operation in the light of this experience, in order to improve their effectiveness.
2. In order to get the Assemblies up and running, a standard agenda was devised for all six of the Assemblies (Bourne, Grantham, Rural North, Rural South, Stamford and The Deepings). Common to each was that written questions were to be submitted to the LAA Chairman at the start of each meeting, these were to be dealt with after the main agenda items and presentations had been completed. This has proved frustrating to some members of the Public who are then forced to sit through a number of agenda items (in which they may have no interest) before their questions are answered, in some cases the person concerned had left the meeting before the question had been addressed.

3. It is therefore suggested that there should be a time limited Open Question and Answer session for one hour at the start of each LAA meeting, which would commence at 7.00pm and not 7.30pm. If this session lasts less than an hour, the Assembly would move on to its main business after perhaps a quick tea/coffee break. Two of the Assemblies (Bourne and Rural North) have been charging customers for tea/coffee and biscuits and donating the proceeds to a local charitable cause, a practice that could perhaps be adopted elsewhere.
4. The session needs to be time limited because, for example, at a recent meeting of The Deepings Assembly, the Question and Answer session was brought forward to the start of the meeting and lasted until nearly 10.00pm, leaving very little time for the rest of the Agenda, indeed some items were deferred or cancelled altogether.
5. A further issue at The Deepings was who should Chair the meeting, the Deepings Assembly wished to elect its own Chairman, however members may feel that the meetings should continue to be chaired by a District Council Cabinet Member as at present, or at the very least an SKDC member.
6. Following the Deepings Assembly meeting a letter was received from Councillor Waterhouse which can be summarised as follows:-
 - At both Deepings meetings the Agendas were far too ambitious in terms of the number of topics covered. One can only digest a certain number of topics in the evening, especially after a long days work.
 - The public forum should be at the start of the meeting and be time limited to one hour.
 - The Agendas do not give the impression of the meetings being consultative as intended, but of being an opportunity for SKDC to present its case with minimum consultation.
 - Neither LAA Agenda was received enthusiastically by the parish councils that Councillor Waterhouse is involved in.

Comments from the Communications & Engagement DSP

The Communications & Engagement DSP considered report DLS28 on Local Area Assemblies at its meeting on 10th March 2005. The DSP agreed to endorse the four conclusions made by Councillor Waterhouse as stated above but to recommend that the public forum be time limited for a maximum of two hours.

Recommendation

The Cabinet's views are requested on all of the points outlined above. These, together with this report, will form the basis of a report to the Full Council on 28th April 2005.

P Morrison
Scrutiny Officer, Democratic and Legal Services