

Leicestershire Strategic Senior Officer Group

19th October 2006

Neighbourhood Engagement Policy

Report of the SSOG Task Group

Purpose of Report

1. To seek the approval of the Group for the attached neighbourhood engagement policy and to the proposals for its implementation.

Background

2. SSOG established a task group to consider the development of a neighbourhood engagement strategy for Leicestershire to ensure a common approach that avoids duplication. The task group was chaired by Jeremy Prescott (VCS) and included Julia MacKechnie (Police), Christine Fisher (District Councils), Sue Ellerby (PCT), Richard Tobin (Local Councils) and Andy Robinson (LCC).

3. The task group met three times and consulted on the draft neighbourhood engagement policy during August and September.

4. The conclusions of the task group are set out in Appendix A. This identifies the key features of Community Forums and proposes that they should form the framework for their implementation through more detailed discussion in District LSPs.

5. The task group proposes to meet again as a co-ordinating group to review progress with the implementation of Community Forums. It will make a progress report in due course.

6. If the recommendations below are approved a report will be made to the Leicestershire Together Board on the 16th November to seek its approval.

Recommendation

7. It is recommended that the Group approves:

- The framework for Community Forums set out in Appendix A;
- The roll out of Community Forums within this framework through District LSPs.
- The Neighbourhood Engagement Strategy (Appendix 1 to Appendix A).

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Appendix A - Neighbourhood Engagement Policy & Community Forums

The Neighbourhood Engagement Policy (attached as Appendix 1) has been subject to consultation with the main stakeholders in the County. The response (summary attached as Appendix 2) was generally supportive of the principles proposed for neighbourhood engagement and of the establishment of Community Forums. It is now proposed that the implementation of Community Forums should be taken forward over the next few months by each District-based Local Strategic Partnership. The attached Neighbourhood Engagement Policy has been amended to reflect this proposed approach and will now be presented to the Leicestershire Together Strategic Senior Officer Group and Board for approval.

There are a number of elements in the proposals which have received general support and should form the framework of the next stage of development:

1. Membership of Community Forums – the core membership should be made up of the elected representatives for the area (County, District & Parish) to reflect their role as Community Champions. Other non elected community representatives may also be members of the Forums which will be supported by officers of service delivery agencies as required.
2. The number of Community Forums - responses suggest an increase in the initial proposal for 21 Forums is desirable. However if this is increased substantially there will be resourcing problems. Therefore it is proposed that the number should not exceed about 25.
3. The boundaries of Community Forums should be consistent with County, District & Parish electoral boundaries.
4. The Terms of Reference set out in the attached policy should form the basis of the Terms of Reference for each Community Forum.
5. Resources – the response highlights the need to ensure that sufficient resources are available to support the Community Forums and any other enhancements to neighbourhood engagement that are considered. The administrative arrangements will be determined through District Local Strategic Partnerships. (The County Council is proposing to employ 3 officers to co-ordinate its input into the Forums and to assist in supporting the Forums generally (subject to approval of the 2007/08 budget). It has also contracted Roberta Norris to assist with the development phase over the next few months.)
6. Terminology – It is important that all stakeholders adopt a common terminology for the various aspects of the neighbourhood engagement agenda. This is attached as Appendix 3 (to be added). It is proposed that the term 'Community Forum' should be used for the (currently) 21 Member based Forums to ensure they are differentiated from other fora

(eg neighbourhood forums or District-based Parish Liaison Forums). In developing Community Forums account should be taken of existing arrangements.

7. The Community Forums should be open to the public. Arrangements for public involvement may vary and could include time set aside before the meeting for surgeries and a public question time as part of the meeting.
8. The Community Forums should be linked to the District Local Strategic Partnerships and Leicestershire Together – the exact nature of that link to be determined by each LSP.

The forthcoming meetings of District LSPs at which proposals will be developed are attached as Appendix 4.

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on behalf of the SSOG Neighbourhood
Engagement Working Group

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Appendix 1

NEIGHBOURHOOD ENGAGEMENT POLICY STATEMENT

Background

1. This policy statement provides a framework for the further development of links with and support for neighbourhoods within Leicestershire

2. Strong links with neighbourhoods are important because they:

- (a) Allow local people to shape and influence service delivery leading to more responsive services and greater public satisfaction in those services;
- (b) Are a strong thread running through the plans of the Government for achieving better service outcomes for the whole population; and,
- (c) Enable County and District Council Members to carry out their role as local champions more effectively.

3. The Government wants opportunities for people to get involved in their neighbourhood everywhere and wants local government to be at the heart of its plans for devolution to the neighbourhood level by building on existing neighbourhood arrangements.

4. Leicestershire County Council, District Councils and other agencies already support neighbourhood working at a number of levels. For example:

- (a) County and District Councillors act as community champions working with the neighbourhoods within their wards and divisions through a variety of mechanisms;
- (b) The Local Area Agreement has introduced neighbourhood management processes to address the deep-seated problems in 20 priority neighbourhoods in the County (see Appendix A). These will be addressed through the seven District-based Local Strategic Partnerships.
- (c) The County Council works with the Leicestershire Association of Parish and Local Councils by, for example, providing web sites and in supporting individual Parish and Town Councils to achieve Quality Council status.
- (d) District Councils use a variety of structures and processes where they work with Parish Councils or specific geographic communities e.g. North West Leicestershire LSP Neighbourhood Action Teams, Annual Parish and Town Council Seminar and Open Space Forums in Blaby.
- (e) Many County and District Council services have close links with parish councils.
- (f) The County Council leads the Leicestershire Rural Partnership which supports local consultation linked to service improvements in the form of Parish Plans and Service Co-ordination events. District Councils and other local agencies are members of the Partnership.
- (g) Neighbourhood policing involves neighbourhood and community engagement at a number of levels.

5. Therefore, this policy statement sets out to improve links with and support for neighbourhoods by building on existing good practice.

Neighbourhood Engagement Model and Core Principles

6. The following are proposed as underpinning core principles:

- (a) Links with and support for neighbourhoods should be shared by all service delivery agencies in the County to avoid duplication and confusion. The County and District Councils will work with their partners through Leicestershire Together and the District-based Local Strategic Partnerships to achieve an agreed joined up approach.
- (b) County and District Councillors should be the main link between the neighbourhoods within their areas and the service delivery agencies that they need to inform and influence on behalf of their electorate. Measures to assist elected Members to act as champions for the neighbourhoods they represent will therefore be required.
- (c) Arrangements should build on and incorporate existing good practice and current arrangements.
- (d) The neighbourhood arrangements should improve the ability of local people and their representatives to scrutinise services provided by the County and District Councils and other service providers.
- (e) Where they exist, Parish and Town Councils play a key role in developing and representing their neighbourhoods.
- (f) In non-parished areas, local proposals for representative arrangements should be supported. Options include neighbourhood forums and parishing.
- (g) Neighbourhood working should be developed in service delivery arrangements.
- (h) Neighbourhood working should incorporate measures to promote and develop community cohesion and social capital and be based on equity of opportunity.
- (i) Neighbourhood working is complementary to links with and support for communities of interest. The work with communities of interest will be set out elsewhere.

The Definition of Neighbourhoods

7. The Government has indicated that the geographic areas represented by elected Members should be a building block for defining neighbourhoods but that local issues, geographic extent and population size will also need to be taken into account.

8. Work within the County has identified four types of neighbourhood unit:

- (a) Parished areas where an elected local council exists to represent the views of the neighbourhood or neighbourhoods within its area.
- (b) Town centres where the population of the surrounding areas gather for shopping, leisure and employment. In these areas the views of a wide range of stakeholders need to be obtained and reflected in improvement plans.
- (c) Non parished areas where new representative structures may be needed to provide a community voice.
- (d) Priority neighbourhoods where concerted multi agency action is required to address deep rooted problems. These areas vary in size sometimes representing a neighbourhood as a whole, sometimes crossing neighbourhood boundaries and sometimes a smaller area within a neighbourhood.

Proposed Clustering of Neighbourhoods

9 It is proposed that these areas be used as the basic units of neighbourhoods in the County and work will be required to improve engagement at these levels. However because there are about 300 of these neighbourhoods it is considered that there is a need for clusters of neighbourhood units to allow practical community scrutiny of local public services and practical engagement with local people through 'Community

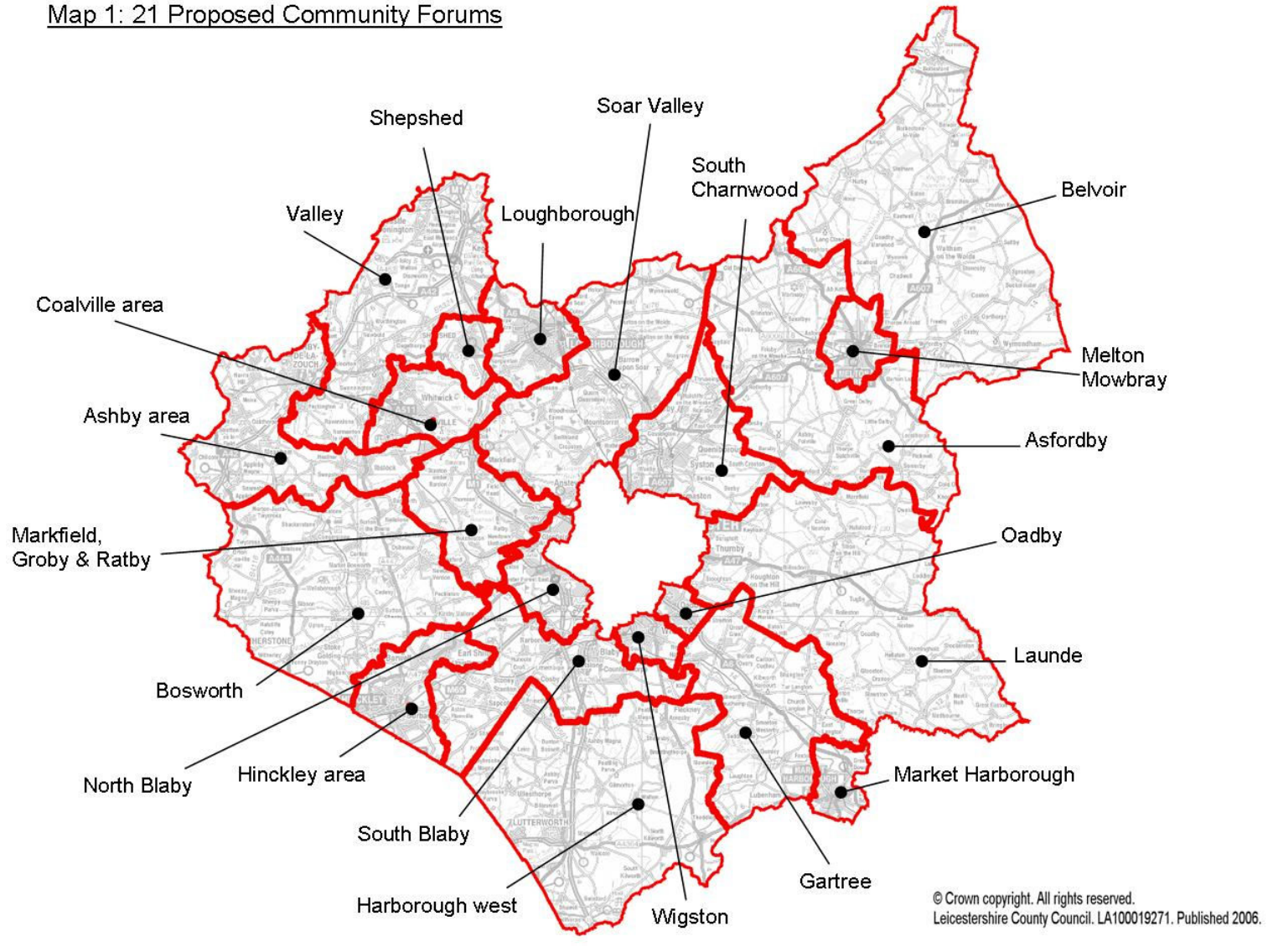
Forums'. The words 'neighbourhoods' and 'communities' tend to be used interchangeably but it is proposed that clusters of neighbourhood areas could usefully be known as communities.

10 The initial proposals for neighbourhood clusters for Community Forums are shown on Map1. Appendix B includes details of draft terms of reference, membership, and processes.

Taking Work Forward

11. Working through Leicestershire Together the public & voluntary sector partners have consulted on this policy and agreed its principles. They have also agreed that within those principles, finalisation of the detail of the arrangements should be taken forward by each District-based Local Strategic Partnership.

Map 1: 21 Proposed Community Forums



Appendix A- LAA Priority Neighbourhoods

Local Authority District	Priority Area	Number of people perceived poor¹
Blaby	Enderby	210
Charnwood	Loughborough East	3,650
Charnwood	Loughborough West	2,040
Charnwood	Mountsorrel	430
Charnwood	South Charnwood ²	613
Harborough	Market Harborough	740
Harborough	Fleckney ⁵	0
Harborough	Gartree ³	0
Hinckley & Bosworth	Hinckley	1,170
Hinckley & Bosworth	Burbage and St Catherines	470
Hinckley & Bosworth	Earl Shilton and Barwell	1,330
Hinckley & Bosworth	Bagworth	370
Melton	Melton	1,180
North West Leicestershire	Greenhill	1,650
North West Leicestershire	Coalville	620
North West Leicestershire	Thringstone and Whitwick	320
North West Leicestershire	Ashby	820
North West Leicestershire	Castle Donington	240
North West Leicestershire	Moira	390
North West Leicestershire	Measham	670
Oadby & Wigston	Wigston	1,700

¹ For each priority area the OAs within the poorest 10% from the PSE index were selected and the number of people defined as poor by the Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey were aggregated

² Added by the District LSP following consultation

³ Does not meet criteria used in discussion paper for priority areas but District to identify specific issues given prison location

APPENDIX B - Community Forums

Terms of Reference

1. To consider the issues facing communities within their area
 - To be informed by reports from local elected members (County/District/Parish Councillors)
 - To be informed by intelligence regarding public views (e.g. from parish plans) and stats
2. To influence the pattern of community engagement within their area
3. To propose improvements to and comment on the quality of service provision by public and voluntary agencies
4. To receive and comment on proposals regarding policy development or service configuration from public and voluntary agencies
5. To influence the community leadership role of the local authorities including the identification of issues to raise with private sector and other bodies (for example - concerns about water supply with Severn Trent, bus services with Arriva Fox or telephone supply with BT)
6. To receive reports on the responses of public and voluntary agencies to the issues raised and views given by them.
7. To be able to represent issues directly to County Council (and to the District Council if it wishes) Cabinet/Scrutiny forums as appropriate.
8. To have representation on relevant forums of Leicestershire Together (and the District LSP if it wishes).

Membership

Options should include an Independent Chair

Manageable number (no more than 25)

2 yearly refresh

Style of meetings and name to be decided by the Forum

Membership drawn from:

All County Councillors (average 3)

District Councillors

Local Councils – individually and in clusters

Voluntary sector

Community groups

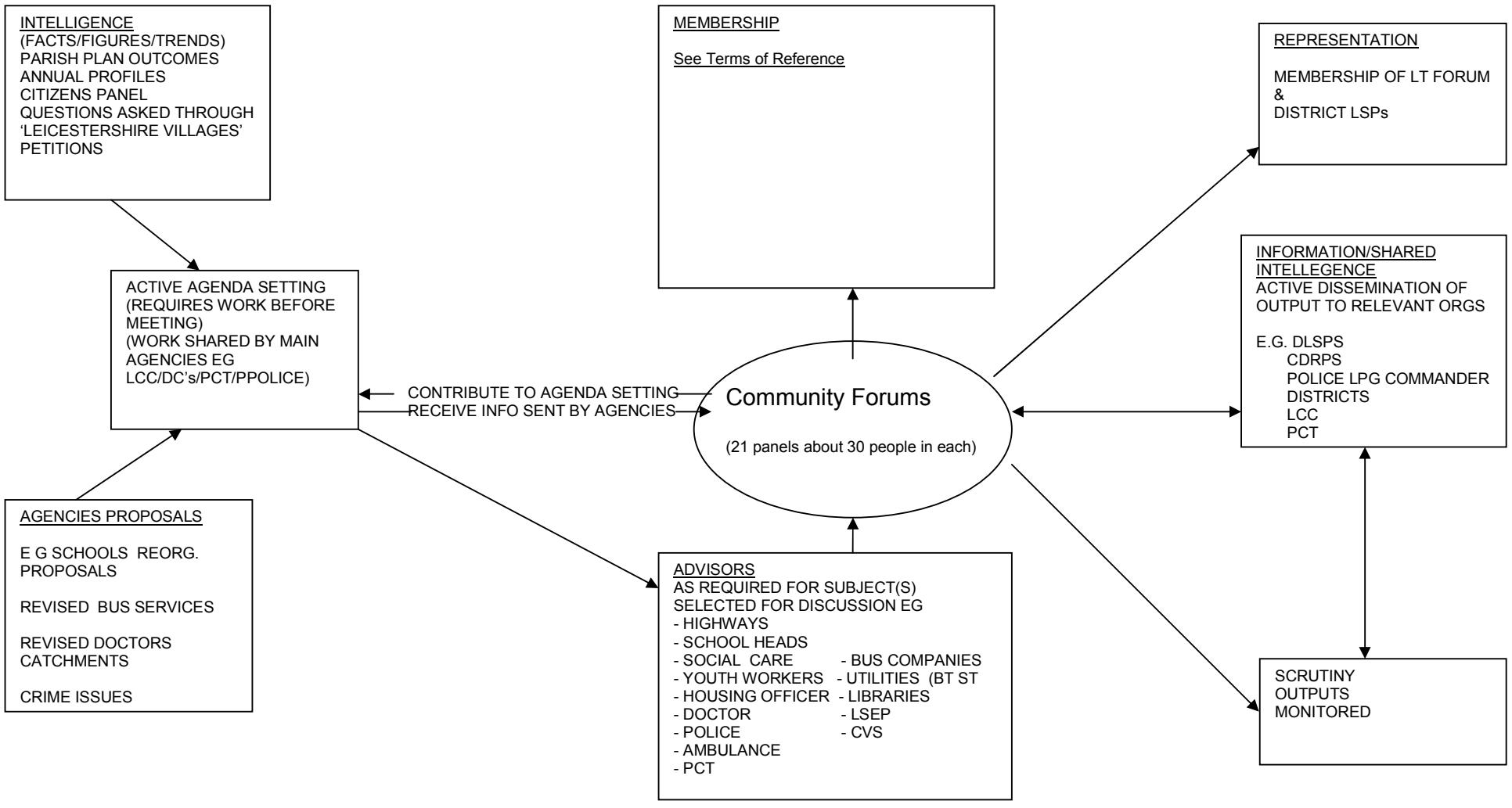
- residents associations
- neighbourhood watch
- play groups

Communities of interest

- ethnicity
- disability
- CYP - (youth reps from school/district youth councils)
- Older (reps from the OP Consultative networks)
- Faith reps
- School Governors (representatives of school families)

Businesses

Private services (shops/pubs/post offices)



PROCESS DIAGRAM

Appendix 2

Neighbourhood Engagement Policy - Summary of Responses

How does the proposed neighbourhood engagement policy generally and the proposed Community Forum's in particular fit with activity in your area?

General support for shared approach to community engagement.

More relevant to universally available services rather than services targeted at individual needs.

Needs resourcing properly

21 areas not local enough

Relationship with District level LSPs - Boards and wider Forums.

Relationship with Neighbourhood Forums for the 18 Priority Neighbourhoods

Relationship with existing individual Council contact arrangements e.g. Talkback in Charnwood

Relationship with (public) Community based Forums in Harborough and Oadby and Wigston

Improving relationships with individual parish councils - e.g. Charnwood's Parish Council Partnership manager.

Relationship with District wide Parish Council meetings.

Change the name to Area Forums?

Do you feel that general neighbourhood level work e.g. at parish council level, needs further support and improvement?

Need to take into account community and tenants associations particularly in non parished areas.

Scope for improved joint working across agencies with parish level.

Better communication and clearer communication with Parish level required.

Dual role of many District/County Councillors helpful

County Councillor involvement in District wide Parish meetings would be helpful.

Uniform approach to District/County/Parish Charters would be helpful.

Additional financial and political support for individual parish councils helpful.

Better links between police and parish councils desirable.

Do you support the principle of community forums and, if not how else would you improve community engagement?

Generally yes.

Support for community champion role of elected Members.

Yes but clear links to District LSPs required.

Melton BC only at neighbourhood level (CF areas too big)..

Oadby and Wigston - build on the three existing forums

Yes but need clarity between roles e.g. with District LSPs

Yes, but must be linked to action

Improve co-ordination of consultation

The County Council should have an officer for each area to attend local meetings etc.

How should consultation with and intelligence about communities be shared? How can joint work between Parish, District and County Councillors be improved? What other improvements can be made?

Structure at District level to bring together local information to identify common issues, responses and possible approaches.

Clearer structure for defining priorities, ensuring effective communication and avoiding duplication.

How many Forums? Could any existing arrangements be used where support is already provided?

Blaby - five to match police areas?

Charnwood - five (split the Soar Valley area into two)

Harborough - no comment

NWL - 3 as proposed - administration a district responsibility.

Melton - none - focus on priority areas and stronger communities settlements

H & B - no comment

Oadby and Wigston - 3 as proposed

Suggestions for an audit of existing arrangements

Could the proposed arrangements for Community Forums be applied differently to get a better fit?

Terms of reference and membership need more consideration

Oadby and Wigston - use the existing forums

Forums need the right level of political representation and intelligence gathering.

A smaller executive is preferred.

Each organisation should have a community engagement plan that includes all planned consultation

How should Forums links with existing partnership delivery processes?

Intelligence should be gathered to inform other groups

Link back through the LSP for agency action

Should the Forums be open to the public and how should this be managed?

Generally yes

Have open surgery session prior to the formal sessions

Strong Chairs

Should Forums be represented on LSPs and raise issues at LSPs or other bodies?

Mixed response to representation on LSPs - a matter for each LSP

Each LSP should receive reports as a minimum

Feedback should be managed to ensure consideration at the right level

Mixed response on right to be heard in other bodies

Arrangements for communities of interest etc

Public question time would help inclusion

Proposals cover it adequately

Good data important

Need separate mechanism for hard to hear groups

Could use some joined up outreach work to identify these communities

Communication methods

Variety of methods proposed/supported

How should consultation outcomes and other intelligence be used to inform the work of the Forums?

Recognised as important but no firm suggestions

Overall Summary

The general concept of joined up community engagement is supported

In general terms the proposed Community Forums are supported by most respondents

The areas for Community Forums generally agreed subject to some sub-divisions.

Core membership of elected Members also agreed - recognising their community champion role

Public element supported

Building better relationships at the parish council level are considered important e.g.

Mechanisms for improving joint work/liaise between County, District and Parish Council members

Common Charters or protocols between the parish council sector and all public agencies

Opportunities for joining up District-wide engagement mechanisms should be considered, including:

Joint use of community meetings - Harborough and Charnwood

Having multi agency approach to regular meetings with Parish Councils

Opportunities for joining up other local engagement mechanisms should be considered, e.g.

Town centre improvement partnerships

Tenants groups

Dealing with outcomes (views and actions) resulting from the Forums

Systems to collate views/opinions and share them widely in a targeted way.

Where should the clearing house be for dealing with actions required?

Collecting and disseminating intelligence more generally

Invest to Save bid proposed

Links with DLSPs needs to be clarified

General agreement that adequate resources needed to make this work

Appendix 3 - TBA

Appendix 4

District LSP Meeting (next two dates)

Hinckley	6 December 2006	7 March 2007
NWL	16 November 2006	15 February 2007
Blaby	6 December 2006	Asked Blaby
Charnwood	27 November 2006	19 February 2007
Melton	19 October 2006	30 November 2006
Harborough	9 October 2006	(No further dates Stephen Curtis)
Oadby & Wigston	No dates	(Nicole Rickard)