

Local Area Forums
Report of the Task and Finish Group

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Executive Summary

Our review is intended to inform the County Council's refresh of its Locality Strategy. LAFs are one of the delivery vehicles for this strategy, but the strategy involves more than just LAFs. We would also like our review to be used by LAF members, and particularly their chairmen, to enhance LAF operations and outcomes.

A Task and Finish Scrutiny Review was commissioned in December 2011 to look at LAFs, and a cross party group of County Councillors was appointed to undertake this. The review was timely given the prevailing localism policy context, the impending County Council Locality Strategy review, and that LAFs had not been reviewed since they were adopted in 2008.

Our review aimed to gather a good overview and understanding of how all the LAFs currently operate and their contribution to locality working, identifying good practice and existing shortcomings, and suggesting how the current model could be improved. Evidence gathered for the review included that heard at public Task and Finish Group meetings, an online survey of LAF attendees, interviews with district council representatives, desktop research and data provided by the BCC Localities Team.

From the evidence collected and current policy context we consider LAFs to be a sound method for delivering localism, and that they should continue, subject to some improvements being made to address this report's findings. A key finding of the review was the widespread uncertainty over the role and purpose of LAFs. We recommend the LAF Terms of Reference are refocused and clarified, to maximise the value of LAFs and their contribution to locality working. The remainder of our recommendations seek to address some of the identified issues with the current LAF operation, and support them in the delivery of their refocused role.

We ask that this report is considered as part of the Locality Strategy refresh, and we make a number of specific suggestions in our conclusion. We also recognise that LAF development and improvement is dependent on the LAF membership enthusiastically embracing change. We would like LAF members to be given an opportunity to respond to this report and for them to be closely involved in work to design and deliver the new locality strategy.

Recommendations

- 1. We recommend an assessment of LAF priorities, by service area, to identify relevant functions and/or decisions for potential delegation to LAFs.**
- 2. We recommend that Cabinet agree a new LAF Terms of Reference refocusing LAFs around their role of 'influencing, enabling and taking action to address local issues'.**
- 3. We recommend that the Cabinet, as part of the Localities Strategy refresh considers how BCC staffing resources can be deployed more effectively to deliver this strategy within existing resources and help to strengthen partnership working with the district councils.**
- 4. We recommend that district councils should be encouraged to have a senior representative/lead area officer at every LAF meeting, and to explore proactive solutions to making their attendance more worthwhile if they are sceptical, including attending agenda setting meeting, and increasing topic awareness among LAF attendees.**
- 5. We recommend that each LAF should maintain a public, flexible forward plan of future meeting topics, with greater LAF member ownership of this and input into it.**
- 6. We recommend that Cabinet ensures that the BCC member development programme, particularly the induction programme for new members, provides clear guidance and support to members in their community leadership role, including expectations and advice on their involvement in LAFs.**
- 7. We recommend that Cabinet rebrands and re-launches LAFs to reinforce any changes made to the role of LAFs detailed in the new Locality Strategy.**

Introduction and Context

1. Local Area Forums (LAFs) have been supported by the county council since 2008. They were an integral part of the revised Getting Closer to Communities (GC2C) Strategy (now known as the Locality Strategy) approved by full council on 10th July 2008. Council recommended that LAFs replace the Local Committees that had been in operation since 2000, on a phased basis and for this to be reflected in the Constitution. At the same time the council approved the LAF Terms of Reference (ToR), Constitution and Working Arrangements for LAFs¹.
2. The 2008 refresh came at a time when county and district councils were working together on the Pathfinder Programme², and was informed by 57 conversations with all the county councillors, and overseen by the then Deputy Leader Bill Chapple with advice from the Community Leadership Policy Advisory Group. There was also a series of 19 discussions between the county councillors in each LAF area, and this helped inform the LAF ToR.
3. Local Committees had enabled more localised decision making at the district level, predominantly on local transport matters, and LAFs were intended to develop this localised decision making further and encourage greater community involvement in shaping service delivery. They would enable service delivery to be more responsive to local needs.
4. The LAFs cover 19 Local Community Areas which were approved as part of the original GC2C strategy in July 2005³. A principal underpinning the introduction of LAFs was that the Local Committee size and structure inhibited true localism and the local decision making envisaged by the Locality Strategy. Furthermore the existence of Local Strategic Partnerships at the district level further supported a move away from additional meetings at this level. The formation of LAFs was accompanied by the devolution of existing council service budgets such as some of the Transportation capital and Highways Maintenance funding. This would be available for the LAFs to tackle identified priorities.
5. It was accepted at the time of the Locality Strategy revision that delivery of the strategy would take several years. LAFs are integral to the council's Locality Strategy and contribute to all five of the strategy's aims. These being:
 - Services that meet community needs
 - Joined up local public services
 - Improved local access to public services
 - Enhanced community leadership role of local members
 - Increased community empowerment

¹ The GC2C Local Area Forums: Draft Constitution, Terms of Reference and Operating Arrangements can be viewed at:

[http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/moderngov/Published/C00000107/M00002493/AI00005640/\\$AppFTORLOCALAREAFORUMS040608.docA.ps.pdf](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/moderngov/Published/C00000107/M00002493/AI00005640/$AppFTORLOCALAREAFORUMS040608.docA.ps.pdf)

² An agreement which aimed to improve two tier working across the County and District Councils in Buckinghamshire, covering shared activities in the areas of Finance, Human Resources, IT and Property Services, but which was abandoned in January 2010.

³ The 2005 Strategy originally featured 24 local community areas but the boundaries were refined in late 2006 to form 19.

6. At their inception there was variable support and appetite for the LAFs across the districts. LAFs were initially introduced in Aylesbury Vale and Wycombe Districts, and subsequently to Chiltern and South Bucks districts. In some areas LAFs are instead called Local Community Partnerships (LCPs). There is no difference between LAFs and LCPs, except in name, and they are all guided by the same 2008 ToR.
7. LAFs were granted discretion over how they operated and their membership⁴. BCC proposed that all county and district councillors were automatically members of their LAF, as well as each parish or town council. To date no LAFs have extended formal membership beyond this grouping.
8. “The purpose of LAFs is to strengthen local democratic accountability by empowering locally elected councillors to take decisions, shape and influence service delivery and council priorities in the local community area”⁵. When they were launched LAFs were expected to:
 - Provide a targeted local focus for discussion, more responsive to local needs
 - De-centralise decision-making based on the 19 areas
 - Enhance the local Member role as the leader in the local community
 - Develop priorities for the local community
 - Co-ordinate policy and service delivery between local partners

This Review

9. Local Area Forums were chosen as a topic for a Task and Finish Review at the 13th December 2011 Overview and Scrutiny Commissioning Committee. The scope of the review (Appendix A) included the clarification of the role and purpose of LAFs, and an assessment of how well they were performing. Mindful of current and proposed changes to public service delivery, we wanted to clarify the role LAFs could play in future years, and any improvements required for this.
10. The review of LAFs was deemed necessary given that since their introduction in 2008 a thorough review of their operation had not been undertaken, and the original intention was for this to take place 12 months after their adoption. With 18 of the 19 local community areas now having a LAF and them being well established in some areas, a review is now timely. The current policy context (see next section), with a commitment to localism affirmed at the national level, also supports the logic in taking a fresh look at the function and performance of LAFs.
11. A key driver for the review was to inform the development of the Council’s refreshed Localities Strategy. The Localities Strategy is much wider than LAFs. However, it is important that a refreshed strategy takes into account the reality of how LAFs have operated in practice and their potential future role. We hope that our report and recommendations will feed in directly to the development of BCC’s and partners thinking on the future of localism and the role of LAFs in this.

Policy Context: Localism, Decentralisation and Big Society

12. BCC can be considered a forerunner in that it was pursuing a Getting Closer to Communities/Locality Strategy years before the coalition government introduced the

⁴ The one procedural requirement was that the chairman was a county councillor.

⁵ Para 7, LAF Terms of Reference 2008

Localism Act adopted in 2012. Localism is often used confusingly alongside the terms 'Big Society' and 'Decentralisation', and although they are closely related they are distinct. The House of Commons and Local Government Committee report on Localism (May 2011)⁶ provides helpful clarification of the terms. Within this a Government Minister, Greg Clarke, identified 'Localism' as the ethos, 'decentralisation' as the process and 'Big Society' as an outcome. Essentially, Localism means to do everything at the most appropriate local level. The rationale is that this will result in better services and outcomes, and in principle it is good for government (and lower levels of government such as councils) to be as close to the people as possible. This results in services tailored to local need, decision-makers having better local knowledge, stronger coordination and reductions in the waste associated with 'one size fits all models'.

13. Features of the Big Society outcome include: empowered local communities able to take decisions and shape their area; public services opened up to be delivered by community groups; and people enabled and encouraged to be a more active members of society.
14. The Localism Act (2012) is a key piece of legislation enabling the government's decentralisation agenda by shifting power from Whitehall to local communities and to a lesser extent their locally elected representatives. The Act enshrines in law a number of measures to enable this power shift such as new freedoms for local government, new powers for communities and individuals, and reform to the planning system to make it more democratic. Beyond the Act the government has already reduced centralised targets and inspections, and reduced barriers to local councils and the voluntary and community sector acting with greater freedom. Against this backdrop the interface between local councils and the grassroots level of parish councils and community groups assumes great importance. As does the need for closer partnership working between local public service delivery agencies.
15. The ongoing constraints in public spending, affecting all levels of government and public service provision, puts even greater onus on the need for partnership working between public services and their local communities to make best use of available resources, whilst focussing on local priorities.
16. The current BCC Corporate Plan includes four corporate priorities. The third and fourth priorities ('helping people to help themselves and each other' and 'working with you') are of greatest relevance to LAFs, given they rely on developing and supporting local community activity and resident-led initiatives. It is therefore clear that the Localism ethos, from which LAFs emerged in 2008, prevails at both the national and local level.
17. It is worth distinguishing BCC's wider localities strategy from the LAFs. LAFs are part of the broader strategy but not the sole component. As a sub-district meeting, LAFs have a role to play in facilitating the Locality Strategy by bringing together local stakeholders and partners, and bridging the gap between the grassroots level and the county/district level of organisations. The Locality Strategy goes much further than LAFs and concerns how BCC service areas take account of local residents in planning and delivering their services, work in partnership with other public bodies, support resident access to service providers and information, and provide an enhanced role for local members. LAFs can support some of these

⁶ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmcomloc/547/547.pdf>

functions, but will not be the only, or most suited, method for delivering all of these. Furthermore, localism is about passing power down to the most appropriate local level, and this sub-district tier will not always be the most appropriate layer. Some aspects of the locality strategy such as devolved provision of some services (e.g. grass cutting) may be better managed at a different level (e.g. parish level).

Policy Context: LAF operation in 2012

18. LAFs operate in 18 of the 19 defined local community areas. Gerrards Cross is the only local community area without a LAF. BCC Democratic Services support up to four LAF meetings per year in each area, providing agenda management and note taking, administrative support and the venues where these cannot be supplied for free by local partners. Five Locality Managers also support the LAFs - one assigned to the LAFs in each of the three districts of Wycombe, Chiltern and South Bucks and two to cover Aylesbury Vale. The Locality Managers have a key role in LAFs such as assisting in agenda-setting for meetings and activities outside the formal meetings on behalf of the LAF and local area, as well as developing the local community plans.
19. Each LAF also has a Lead Area Officer from BCC, who is a senior member of staff from any of its services areas, who attends as a county council representative. In Aylesbury Vale, the district council also provides a Lead Area Officer. Other BCC and partner organisation staff (such as from the Police and Fire Service) attend LAFs dependent on the agenda content.
20. Each LAF has a chairman who is a county councillor, and a vice chairman who is a district councillor. Parish and town councils are able to appoint a voting representative(s). LAFs are also free to allow representatives from other public services and local groups/organisations to be members. In practice no other organisations have been invited into voting membership.

Review Methodology

21. Evidence gathering for this review took place during April and May 2012. The following councillors were appointed to the Task and Finish Group: Brian Roberts (Chairman), Mary Baldwin (Vice Chairman), Noel Brown, Trevor Egleton, Netta Glover, Bill Lidgate, Jenny Puddefoot, and Paul Rogerson. The review was supported by Kelly Sutherland from Democratic Services and James Povey from the Scrutiny Team.
22. The review was carried out using the following methods:
 - Initial planning meeting to clarify the scope and key lines of enquiry
 - Evidence gathering at public Task & Finish Group meetings
 - Online survey of LAF attendees (completed by 151 people⁷, of which half were responding on behalf of an organisation)
 - Interviews with member and officer representatives from each of the four district councils
 - Requests for written information and views
 - Desktop research

⁷ To put this into context, based on the average LAF attendance in the past 2 years of 19 people, a single round of quarterly LAFs would be attended by 342 people. 151 survey respondents represents 44% of this quarterly LAF attendance total.

- Data on LAF activities and operation from the BCC Localities Team

23. We were keen to also learn from practice elsewhere in the country in operating LAF type arrangements. Unsurprisingly, practice varies and some examples are set out in Appendix B. There are few examples of a two-tier area with sub-district forums such as Buckinghamshire. We wanted to know more about what 'locality working' looked like in practice, and to do this we wanted to find out more about an area which is quite advanced in the degree to which they have embraced this. Wiltshire Council is a unitary authority renowned for their locality working, and they operate sub-district forums. We felt Buckinghamshire could learn from them and hence during one of our meetings we heard from a representative from their Communities team.

The Role and Value of LAFs

24. The three roles stated in the 2008 LAF ToR are:

- Local community planning and setting priorities for the area
- Empowered local decision making, with delegated functions and delegated budget
- Influencing and taking action on local issues

25. The basic principles of LAFs contained in the ToR are detailed as:

- Within the agreed corporate framework for LAFs, freedom and flexibility exists for them to deliver on the needs of the local area
- The operation of the LAFs should be tailored to meet local needs, this may require cross-LAF working (e.g. across district boundaries or for the whole of a district) on certain issues
- Success will require effective and tailored local partnerships and an inclusive approach to engagement
- In particular, the operation of the LAF will need to be sensitive and complementary to existing arrangements for local community engagement and community planning (this will require discussion and agreement at the appropriate local level)
- LAFs should focus on consensus building around local needs and identify what can be delivered locally from the list of local aspirations
- Collective ownership of the delivery of local community priorities across the various partners will be essential to achieve credibility with local people and to make things happen
- LAFs will need to operate with a sense of realism about what can be delivered (particularly in the early days) and to manage community expectations
- All BCC Services (and partners where possible) will be expected to devolve functions and budgets for local decision making where this makes sense
- LAFs should encourage local community engagement and participation within and outside meetings, ensuring that all voices are heard.

These principles feature the key messages of local flexibility, partnerships, complementary to existing arrangements, consensus, collective ownership of priorities, realism, local engagement and participation.

26. One of the main purposes of the review was to clarify the role and purpose of LAFs, and one of the key findings from the evidence collected was the significant uncertainty over what the role and purpose of LAFs is. At meetings with district council representatives (see Appendix C), South Bucks District Council felt the current aims were confused, Aylesbury Vale did not think all intended objectives were being performed and queried whether attendees and chairmen understood these, and Wycombe felt the LAF aspirations were too broad and needed greater clarity. Chiltern felt uncertainty of the LAF purpose and the variation in functions being performed were undermining the LAF outcomes. Concerns over the clarity of the LAF role were also expressed at the Evidence Session (see Appendix D) by representatives from the BCC Place Service, Health Services and the BCC Localities Manager when summing up what she had heard from partners during the session.

27. As part of our survey of LAF Attendees they were asked how satisfied they were with how LAFs are performing a number of functions. For each of these functions

there was at least 25%⁸ of the sample who said they were dissatisfied with how the function was being performed. This could point to a variable LAF performance or inconsistency in the functions being performed. Either way it suggests those that attend LAFs do not share a clear view of what LAFs do.

28. Uncertainty over the LAF role would appear to stem from the lack of a definitive purpose for LAFs, variation in the roles different LAFs are currently performing, and a lack of understanding by attendees and particularly chairmen on what the intended LAF role is. It could also stem from the confused presentation of the LAF role in the 2008 Locality Strategy. The Strategy itself states what LAFs will do, but this differs from the three broad roles for LAFs contained in the LAF ToR. The LAF ToR itself is also confused in how it presents the three roles followed by a sub set of functions under different headings. In none of the literature on LAFs available online is there a definitive set of LAF objectives, nor in any of the Local Community Plans.
29. It is vital that LAFs have a clearly defined role and objective, to ensure they perform effectively and deliver value for money. Evidence collected suggests this is important for the following reasons:
- to secure greater buy-in, support and attendance for the meetings
 - to reduce any perception that LAFs are an unnecessary layer or duplicate other activities
 - to guide the style and content of meetings
 - to move beyond a narrow LAF focus on competing for BCC funding
30. We broadly agree that the LAFs should perform the 2008 roles (para 24) and with the principles of the ToR (para 25), and consider them to be in line with the prevailing Localism ethos at the national and local level. However, we feel there is room for improvement in how the roles are performed and their clarity. Overall, in the interests of increasing the value of LAFs, giving them a stronger sense of purpose, raising their profile, increasing partnership working and unlocking further support for them, we feel the LAFs should be refocused with greater emphasis placed on the third role, with the LAFs becoming more active to address their own priorities. The first step to achieving this greater focus should be through the adoption of a new and succinct ToR.
31. The next three sections of this review look at each of the three original LAF roles stated above, and the improvements required for LAFs to fulfil these better, and overall become more effective and deliver greater value. With LAFs focussing on delivery of the third role we see the first two roles becoming part of the means to which this is achieved. The chapter concludes with a suggested new LAF ToR.

LAF Role: Local Community Planning & Setting Priorities for the Area

32. From the survey of LAF attendees there was a good level of satisfaction (net satisfaction score of 50 with 83% of survey respondents having read their plan) with the performance of this function by LAFs, and hence recognition of this role being performed. All 18 LAFs have a Local Community Plan, and this is available online.

⁸ For the highest net satisfaction score (63 for a 'forum for public service provider partnership working and liaison') there were 41 respondents dissatisfied with how this function was being performed (25% of those surveyed). The other nine functions all scored lower levels of net satisfaction.

The formulation of a local plan and identification of priorities are important activities in underpinning how representative the LAFs are of local community feelings and issues, as well as providing a platform for the work and discussions of the LAF. They are also important for giving the LAF a sense of purpose and direction.

33. Evidence collected suggests there is room for improvement in how the LAFs are deemed to be representative of the local community (24% of survey respondents disagreed that LAFs were aware of the main issues and needs of the local community, with only 66% in agreement). Comments made via the survey indicated the LAF meetings and priority workshops could be undermined by inadequate attendance and input, and dominance by particular groups or individuals. Improvements in how representative LAFs are of the community could be achieved through broader attendance and input (see paragraph 81 onwards).
34. Given the priority setting workshops conducted by the LAFs should provide the foundation for the work that follows at the LAF meetings, it makes sense for a high degree of effort to go into making this representative and informed by a broad cross section of the local community and available data. In some cases this is already happening and Action4Youth⁹ spoke positively at the Evidence Session of young people's involvement in this process at some LAFs. Social media could also be used to broaden input into the local priority setting.

LAF Role: Empowered Local Decision Making, with Delegated Functions and Delegated Budget

35. This role encompasses two distinct functions and so the report deals with them individually, one concerns the power to make decisions on delegated budget, and another on making decisions on any delegated functions (such as how a service is delivered) passed to the LAF. The 2008 LAF ToR states "all BCC services (and partners where possible) will be expected to devolve functions and budgets for local decision making where this makes sense". Overall these two functions are means in which to give LAFs greater influence over local service delivery, by handing the LAF direct control of certain services and budgets.

Delegated Functions

36. There is little evidence of many BCC service areas, let alone partners, devolving functions and their associated budgets for local decision making by LAFs. The Transportation Service (now part of the BCC Place Service) has been the exception, having provided a delegated budget to LAFs. To date, LAFs have not made any decisions on local service provision. It is apparent, supported by what was heard at the evidence session from BCC representatives, that most BCC services primarily see LAFs as a communication tool, for top-down and bottom-up information provision/dissemination¹⁰.
37. At our Evidence Session Martin Phillips (BCC Cabinet Member for Community Engagement) said he would like to devolve more decisions down to the local level. This would demonstrate a stronger commitment to the Localism ethos, and address

⁹ Action4Youth is a registered charity which coordinates voluntary organisations that work with children and young people in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

¹⁰ Martin Tett felt "quite often LAF agendas were a very generic top down roll out of communications from BCC" and Martin Phillips saw LAFs primary role as to "facilitate communications between BCC and the parishes and vice versa".

the perception that LAFs lack power and budget which was cited as a reason for dissatisfaction with LAFs in the survey of attendees¹¹.

38. A pilot exercise of Wiltshire Council's Area Boards found the delegation of powers to be essential to their effective operation. It added credibility and avoided the perception of the Boards as 'talking shops'. The Boards now have decision making powers providing the decision accords with a number of criteria¹², and the final decision is approved by the elected unitary councillors. Decisions taken by the Area Boards include prioritising road safety Speed Indicator Device locations, prioritising locally requested highway schemes for submission to the highways department, and decisions on some parking matters. From the review evidence session it was apparent that there is potential for LAFs to assume greater responsibility over certain services. The Place Service representatives suggested involvement in rights of way and community asset transfer decisions, and an Adult Social Care representative suggested involvement with the Prevention Matters funding secured where LAFs could take more of a lead in investigating local needs and for the service to fund identified community initiatives.
39. For LAFs to assume a greater role in service provision and decisions, there must be a stronger steer from county council leadership for this to happen, a change in officer culture, and a willingness by LAFs to embrace new responsibilities. BCC Place Service representatives identified a need for the mindset of officers to adjust to encouraging greater local influence whilst also emphasising that LAFs needed to demonstrate a desire to get involved and take on more responsibility.
40. BCC service areas should assess the current LAF priorities for potential to delegate functions and decisions. This would increase the likelihood that LAFs would be interested in the functions identified. We think this would serve as a useful exercise to test whether this LAF role is deliverable, and raise awareness among LAF members of potential delegated functions on offer.

Recommendation 1

We recommend an assessment of LAF priorities, by service area, to identify relevant functions and/or decisions for potential delegation to LAFs.

Delegated Budget

41. In 2011/12 the average allocation from the delegated budget, from the total countywide sum of £880k, was £2,847. A list of the projects which received this funding is in Appendix E.

¹¹ Comments made in survey of attendees: "More involvement of elected councillors and better attendance by members would result from more powers and resources", "Advisory body on local spending decisions - a greater degree of delegation required."

¹² Area Boards can make decisions if this does not have a significant impact outside of the area concerned, impact significantly on the overall budget or resources of the council, contradict any policy or service standard established by the council, relate to the management of any individual member of staff, involve the discharge of regulatory or quasi-judicial functions.

42. A feeling expressed via our survey of LAF attendees¹³ and in meetings with South Bucks and Wycombe District Council representatives was that the budget is too small to make a real impact on local priorities, and once it is broken down and spread across the LAF area there is little that can be funded beyond very small scale measures. BCC Leader Martin Tett expressed a desire at the Evidence Session for LAFs to spend their budget on more substantial projects rather than spreading it too thinly across the area.
43. In contrast the VCS representatives at the Evidence Session felt that even the small sums on offer were of great value to VCS groups.
44. There is also a view among some BCC Members that the delegated sums fail to take sufficient account of the varying size of the Local Community Areas in terms of area and population, or their varying needs.
45. Additional delegated budget from BCC is highly unlikely in the current climate, although it is keen to maintain current budget levels¹⁴. Therefore if the delegated budget is to increase, or more significant projects are to be funded, then partners will need to allocate budget to the LAFs or the LAFs will need to avoid dividing the budget into small amounts. From our meeting with district council representatives it would seem unlikely that additional budget allocation from partners will be forthcoming, although it could become more likely if some of the perceived deficiencies with LAFs which this report identifies are rectified, LAFs had a clear role, and their future development was clearer. We found that in other parts of the country where sub-district forums operate the district councils contribute to the delegated funding alongside the county council, for example in Warwickshire and parts of Kent.
46. The use of existing delegated budgets on larger more tangible projects may enhance the profile of LAFs and strengthen their sense of purpose. A number of LAFs are benefiting from a focus on a small number of key priorities, which inform the LAF meeting agendas, the activities they undertake and use of their delegated budget (examples include Beeches LAF and Chepping Wye LCP).

LAF Role: Influencing and Taking Action on Local Issues

47. The LAF functions detailed in the 2008 ToR, clarifies this role as:
- Overseeing community engagement, coordinate local consultation events, promote and extend community empowerment in the area.
 - Refer local concerns to relevant organisations, monitor action and negotiate resolution of issues
 - Undertake a local scrutiny role on service policy, performance or issues of local concerns, including co-option into overview and scrutiny committees.
48. As already stated we see this role as being the focus for LAF activity, and from the evidence gathered it would appear that this is the area where LAFs have the

¹³ Comments made via the survey included: "The LAF could play a much bigger part in local affairs with a bigger budget". "My only reservations surround the lack of Finance/Budgets." "(LAFs should) Be given much larger devolved budgets so that communities, parishes etc feel that their debates and decisions make a real difference and they can have a genuine direct influence on outcomes that their residents really notice."

¹⁴ Martin Tett stated at the Evidence Session that "support to LAFs was not likely to increase in the current period of austerity".

potential to really add value and there is the greatest scope for strengthening this role.

LAFs Taking Action

49. We found evidence of some excellent practice by LAFs in working to take action. The case studies below illustrate this.

LAF Case Studies

Great Brickhill, Wing & Ivinghoe Freight Quality Partnership and Speed Awareness Group

With HGVs a local priority the LAF worked to develop a Freight Quality Partnership. The lead on this was taken by the LAF Chairman Avril Davies and a local parish councillor Chistabel Boersma. Since 2009 the membership has grown and is an active voice for the LAF bringing together local parishes with relevant agencies (Road Haulage Association, Police and BCC). Various FQP meetings are held outside the LAF meetings, some by the full membership and some for just the working group. The project demonstrates a LAF using not only its financial resources to support a project but also LAF members and local people, who have actively tackled a local priority.

In 2012 this LAF established a Speed Awareness Subgroup comprising LAF Chairman Netta Glover, the Police, BCC officers and nine parishes. A range of measures are being investigated to tackle speeding. Not only does the LAF provide financial resources, it has also facilitated cross parish working and cooperation, and is facilitating the recruitment of local community volunteers to support and deliver some of the initiatives with a range of events and activities. Not only does this local community support unlock local resources, but also encourages community buy in to the projects increasing their likely impact.

More recently, the LAF has agreed to set up a Footpaths & Cyclepaths' subgroup where not all subgroup members are LAF members, but have been nominated by local parishes as local residents who are best served to support and take a project forward.

Greater Aylesbury and Wendover Participatory budgeting

Has given residents a greater say and participation in LAF budget expenditure, where people could vote for their preferred projects using public ballot boxes in a range of locations throughout the area or a dedicated website. This has generated local buy-in and interest and raised the profile of both the LAF and the participating organisations. There has been demonstrable local leadership from the LAF Chairmen, Mary Baldwin and Bill Chapple, and excellent local support from many of the other LAF members, particularly local Members. There has also been a wide local involvement from the Town and parishes.

Importantly, both projects in Greater Aylesbury and Wendover have engaged with all sectors of the community, including young people with involvement with local schools and youth groups – including a whole school project at the Mandeville School in Aylesbury.

Greater Aylesbury Parking Subgroup

County Councillor Chester Jones is leading on this long standing local issue with the help of a LAF sub group comprising BCC officers, district councillors, the Police and interested residents. Work has been undertaken to explore possible solutions and identify local stakeholders who can help, such as local schools. The LAF has agreed to part-fund a parking scheme, along with Chester's community leader's fund, which should alleviate some of the parking issues and will continue to work with local stakeholders to monitor and resolve the issue.

Chesham & Chiltern Villages: Building Community Capacity

£5000 of LAF funding supported a project which resulted in 30 new and existing volunteers being recruited in first six months to the 'Hilltop Villages Good Neighbours Group', who identified priority issues concerning support for the elderly (e.g. social transport, advice, overcoming isolation). Overall aim was to encourage independence for older villagers, so they can remain in the community. Through discussion at the Chesham and Chiltern Villages LAF as well as the Missendens LCP, the project was extended to Ashley Green and Great Missenden.

Street Dream project

An example of LAF working in partnership (Chiltern DC, TV Police, Paradigm Housing) to deliver a project to tackle local priority of youth/anti social behaviour. Street Dreams were commissioned by the LAF and district council to work with young people on the Hazel Road Estate in Prestwood. The intention was to engage those hard-to-reach youngsters currently using cannabis and having low self-esteem and draw them into the Prestwood Youth Club. The local PCSOs, Neighbourhood Sergeant and Paradigm Housing Community Development Officer were part of the working group.

Missenden Parking and Transport sub group

A LCP task and finish group was set up to make recommendations and develop an action plan. Lead by the LAF chairman Mike Colston, the sub group had representatives from TfB, local residents, CDC councillors and Parish Councillors. The list of schemes was prioritised for funding from the LAF this year and will also inform future expenditure and fundraising.

50. One of the ways in which LAFs have been able to take action successfully is through establishing sub-groups and/or 'priority champions', who work on projects outside the LAF and feed back to it. There was support expressed by BCC Place Service representatives at the Evidence Session for such groups, which would assist service areas in providing support for LAF activity. However, not all LAFs are being so proactive, and 29% of LAF attendees surveyed were dissatisfied with LAFs performing the function of 'instigating or supporting local community led projects'. This variation is apparent from our experience of participating in our own local LAFs and is acknowledged by the Locality Managers.
51. The 2008 LAF functions, whilst all still valid, do not go far enough in encouraging a more proactive LAF attitude to address issues of local concern. To encourage a greater focus on action by the LAF, we think each LAF should be encouraged to develop an action plan for the year ahead to address the local priorities identified and deliver their Community Plan. Together these would guide a significant amount

of LAF activity, including meeting content, decisions on delegated budget, and the officer and member support provided.

52. Some LAFs may feel there is limited potential for taking action directly and prefer to concentrate on commissioning other bodies to address their issues. However, it is hoped that with other suggested improvements in this report to increase and broaden LAF attendance, strengthen partnership working and support for them, the potential for a more active LAF mindset is increased.
53. Coupled with a LAF Action Plan is the suggestion for LAFs to produce an annual report on how this has been delivered. These reports should be publically accessible. It may also be helpful for the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Engagement to highlight the achievements of LAFs at full council to promote localism and raise awareness of the good work that is taking place.

LAF Influence

54. One example of how LAFs are following through in taking action and influencing service providers is through the introduction of an online issue tracker, so that issues raised at LAF meetings can be monitored online to see how they are progressed to resolution. This is an initiative already carried out by other local authorities (e.g. Leicestershire, Wiltshire), and helps improve transparency and reassures LAF attendees that matters raised are being addressed and that it is worthwhile attending LAFs. It should also help to improve the speed at which issues are addressed.
55. A number of survey responses queried the degree of influence LAFs exerted on service providers¹⁵. If it is not obvious how LAFs are influencing local service delivery, it will be difficult to demonstrate how this function is being performed by LAFs and the value of them.
56. A suggested area of improvement would be to make it more visible and obvious how LAFs and their local priorities have influenced service delivery, and the plans and strategies of public service agencies. The onus should be on both the LAFs and service providers to demonstrate how influence is being exerted. This scale of this influence goes beyond LAFs and is an element of the wider Locality Strategy. As such the degree to which this is happening, and how it could be improved is out of the scope of this review. Given concerns have been raised however as part this review, and this has implications for the effectiveness and value of LAFs we suggest the refresh of the BCC Locality Strategy looks at this in greater detail.

LAF Scrutiny Role

57. This third function in the preceding ToR list (paragraph 47) is currently being performed to a limited extent by LAFs. Most obviously it is done fairly informally through LAFs raising issues over service delivery, and passing these on to the service deliverer. However, this LAF scrutiny function could have increasing relevance in the future with reducing public service budgets and resources, and significant changes to how services are delivered (See next paragraph). At the

¹⁵ The following comments were made: LAFs should: "Have greater influence over service delivery", and have "more bottom up discussions which can be felt to influence County and/or District" and should "feel that their debates and decisions make a real difference and they can have a genuine direct influence on outcomes that their residents really notice."

Evidence Session both the BCC leader and the BCC Director of Children Services highlighted the scrutiny role LAFs could perform in future.

58. There are significant changes in how education, health and police are planned and managed currently being implemented. Elected Police and Crime Commissioners, academies and free schools, and the formation of clinical commissioning groups and a Health and Wellbeing Board are notable examples of this. Public service agencies generally are increasingly commissioning service delivery rather than delivering services directly themselves, and also forging alliances with neighbouring and partner organisations make efficiency savings. These changes can blur the lines of accountability and local influence.
59. Scrutiny at the LAF level could supplement the county and district member scrutiny role already performed, and would help to get local communities more engaged in this area. In practice it would involve a LAF identifying an issue or aspect of public service delivery of local concern, collecting evidence and examining it in more detail, and then making recommendations on how the issue could be addressed by relevant agencies. This activity can be of great value when the solutions to an issue are not obvious, or they cut across multiple areas or agencies.

Petitions

60. Petitions are another means by which the local community can influence service delivery and so align with the purpose of LAFs. There has been some concerns raised by BCC members over the role of LAFs in the submission of petitions, and some uncertainty of existing procedures. LAFs are not mentioned in the current BCC Petitions Scheme guidance available online, but petitions are currently submitted to LAFs as well as to the council by other means. They are not mentioned in the LAF ToR either.
61. There is merit in LAFs receiving petitions and, subject to the topic being of local interest, debating and discussing the subject in more detail, and having the opportunity to express a view on the matter or putting their support behind it. If the matter is, however, of a very local or strategic nature the LAF may not want to contribute.
62. The guidance on petitions policy has changed nationally, and it is likely this will be reviewed locally in the near future. We suggest that as part of any review the role of LAFs in the petitions process is made clearer, recognising the contribution they can make.

New LAF Terms of Reference

63. Given the preceding sections on how LAFs are performing the original 2008 roles and the prevailing policy context we recommend that they adopt a new ToR which would provide a succinct and clear guide to their activity and deliver their core aim of influencing, enabling and taking action to address local issues. These ToR should be published, available on the LAF web pages and at every LAF meeting.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that Cabinet agree a new LAF Terms of Reference refocusing LAFs around their role of 'influencing, enabling and taking action to address local issues'.

We suggest the following features as part of a new ToR which explains that LAFs should:

- Be inclusive and open partnership forum meetings, with membership by all locally elected councillors, and other partners to be agreed locally.
- Maintain a set of key priorities for the local community area, informed by relevant local data sets, information collated at the grassroots level, and broad community engagement and representation.
- Communicate these priorities to partners at county, district and parish levels.
- Maintain an action plan to address key priorities, and where necessary establish sub-groups to expedite actions. This action plan should be the starting point for all LAF activity including meetings, delegated budget guidance, officer and member support.
- Monitor and report on the delivery of the action plan
- Gather and formulate local views and issues upwards to relevant bodies / service delivery agencies.
- Raise local awareness of public service delivery proposals and consultations.
- Guide how funding delegated to Local Community Areas is spent to address LAF key priorities.
- Make decisions on matters devolved from public agencies to the LAF.
- Perform a scrutiny function on specific areas of public service delivery and key local issues.
- Provide a forum for the receipt, discussion and submission of local petitions

64. We consider this suggested core aim and accompanying ToR to be a good starting point for discussions over how LAFs should be improved and their role in the wider Localities Strategy. We feel LAFs must recognise that, as in any area of public spending, they must deliver value for money, particularly for their principle sponsor, BCC.

65. If LAFs performed the full range of functions expected of them, through influencing the sizeable spends of BCC (over £300m per annum) and other partners, and unlocking or leveraging in additional resource for locality working, they would represent much better value for money. There is evidence this is already happening but there is significant scope for improvement.

LAF Boundaries

66. The report on the 2008 Locality Strategy (then GC2C) explains in more detail the work undertaken and data analysed in defining the local community areas. Although not especially prominent in the evidence collected, it did come up as an issue among some LAF attendees when explaining their dissatisfaction, is known to be a source of contention among some parish councils, and representatives of South Bucks District Council are very sceptical of the need for a four separate LAFs when they feel a district wide one would suffice. At the Evidence Session the BCC Leader felt that some boundaries had not been set well which undermined the community engagement that could be achieved. The issue covers the degree to which the defined area is perceived as a 'natural community', as well as the South Bucks scepticism over the need for sub-district groupings, and the combining of parished and un-parished areas in High Wycombe.
67. We understand that there is already flexibility for parishes to attend alternative neighbouring LAF meetings, with opportunities to formalise this transfer with BCC. For example Stoke Mandeville Parish Council, formally part of GALAF, also attend the Wendover LAF. We also recognise that it is a fundamental principle of the BCC's Locality Strategy that an alternative district level arrangement would not be sufficiently local to allow a satisfactory level of community engagement. It would also duplicate other meetings and arrangements at this level, with implications for the profile and distinctiveness of LAFs.
68. Some representatives from South Bucks LAFs we have heard from feel the countywide LAF model is less suited to their area given the smaller number and larger size of parishes here compared to the north of the county. Some therefore question the need for a sub-district tier of meeting. Martin Phillips (BCC Cabinet Member for Community Engagement) undertook his own review of LAFs in South Bucks in 2011 (see Appendix F). This found that there was an even split of parish council's that wanted to retain the current four LAFs setup, and those that wanted an alternative arrangement of a single district wide LAF. The parishes in favour of retaining the current structure represent a larger proportion of the population however.
69. The focus of this report on LAFs rather than the wider localities strategy has meant the local community boundaries have not been examined in great enough detail to identify how they should change, if at all. Any changes would have implications not just for the LAF meetings but the wider Localities Strategy as the defined local areas are the building blocks for this. It is clear that over time some of the initial hostility to the LAFs in some parts of the county has waned once these have bedded-in and parish councils recognised the opportunities they present.
70. Nevertheless we consider it would be sensible that as part of any refresh of the wider Locality Strategy, some work should be undertaken to identify and remedy where possible any community boundary concerns parishes have, to ensure this issue does not undermine the work of LAFs.

The LAF Meetings – Best Practice and Areas for Improvement

71. It is clear from the evidence collected that LAFs all operate differently, which is to be expected given the varying personalities of those involved and the size and composition of the LAF membership. We feel that providing those involved have a good understanding of what the purpose and remit of LAFs are, they should be free to deliver this how they see fit. The following chapter identifies some suggested improvements which we feel could enhance the performance of LAFs, and we hope this will aid LAF chairmen and their members.

LAF Support and Costs

72. Representatives from South Bucks DC felt greater efforts were required to join LAFs up with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) network, and other improvements detailed in this report to raise the LAF profile and widen involvement may have implications for the level of support needed by LAFs. It was notable that when we heard from a Wiltshire Council representative that they have a dedicated Locality Manager for each of their LAF equivalents (known as Area Boards), whilst in Buckinghamshire these are shared typically across four LAFs. It is unlikely the BCC Locality Services budget which funds the Locality Managers will be increased, and so if more support is required to enhance the operation of LAFs it will need to come from better use of existing resources in BCC Service areas, and community engagement teams at partner organisations, notably the district councils.
73. We feel there is scope for BCC service areas to support LAFs more than they do. There are links here with the wider localities strategy and the degree to which BCC service areas embrace locality working. The established Local Area Technicians in Transport for Buckinghamshire are a good example where a service has Locality focussed staff serving as a contact and providing other support to the LAF. At the Evidence Session John Lamb the Place Service Director stated he would like to see this LAT structure replicated in other areas, and teams to think more locally. It was also clear that there is potential for greater LAF involvement in the work of Childrens Services and Adults and Wellbeing, and these service areas need to support LAFs in contributing to these areas. Staff exposure to locality working would increase if service areas increased their contact with, and support to LAFs.
74. Chiltern DC spoke very positively of the close working between the BCC Locality Manager and their own community team. This included co-location at their offices, sharing of information, and the Locality Manager linking into the grassroots activities they supported. A product of this was the work on antisocial behaviour in Chesham where resources from Paradigm Housing, the district council, Police and LAF were pooled to commission the VCS to deliver interventions to good effect. If replicated elsewhere in the county this could reduce duplication of activity and bind the LAF activities closer to the grassroots and district levels.
75. There is a common misconception that the total Locality Services budget (£1,188m in 2011/12) equals the costs of providing the LAF meetings and the allocation of the Local Priorities (delegated) budget (£880k in 2011/12 comprising both the Local Priorities and delegated Transportation funding). Unsurprisingly this has invited criticism that the LAFs are poor value for money, with administration costing more than the budget they have to allocate.

76. In 2011/12 the Localities Team operational budget was £598k, which covers among other things the staff costs of the team including the five Locality Managers and the Locality Services Manager. This review assessed the costs incurred by BCC in providing the LAF meetings, using data supplied by Democratic Services and estimates of staff time incurred at and in support of meetings. This gave an approximate figure of £150k per annum, with the bulk of this incurred by Democratic Services (£113k) for room hire, publicity and officer support.
77. The Localities Team put relatively few resources into the meetings themselves, and most of their time is spent on other Locality Working such as:
- a. supporting/project managing community asset transfers
 - b. supporting service transfers such as libraries and youth clubs
 - c. progressing local initiatives
 - d. liaising with local community groups and strategic partnerships
 - e. and supporting county councillors.

To varying degrees this work is linked with the LAFs, but could feasibly continue even if the LAF meetings did not take place.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Cabinet, as part of the Localities Strategy refresh considers how BCC staffing resources can be deployed more effectively to deliver this strategy within existing resources and help to strengthen partnership working with the district councils.

78. South Bucks and Aylesbury Vale District Council currently field a representative at each LAF, and Chiltern have recently agreed to do likewise. Wycombe District Council previously provided regular senior officer support at meetings but now only send a representative depending on the agenda relevance. Non-attendance by a representative from such a significant local public service provider as the district council at LAFs as a matter of course is not helpful to their functioning. Particularly in their role influencing local service providers. It also reinforces a view that LAFs are county council meetings rather than a partnership forum, which was a perception that emerged from our meetings with all the district council representatives other than Aylesbury Vale. Comments were also received via the survey of LAF attendees expressing dissatisfaction with the level of district council involvement in LAFs¹⁶. AVDC have been proactive in their involvement in LAF agenda pre-meetings, and in issuing an AVDC newsletter to every LAF. This has helped broaden the topics discussed at meetings and made officer attendance more worthwhile.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that district councils should be encouraged to have a senior representative/lead area officer at every LAF meeting, and to explore proactive solutions to making their attendance more worthwhile if they are sceptical, including attending agenda setting meeting, and increasing topic awareness among LAF attendees.

¹⁶ Reasons given for dissatisfaction with LAFs in the survey of attendees included: "District Council involvement to date is completely absent which is an unfortunate oversight given District's close and relevant community support". The following was also received from an Aylesbury Vale parish councillor: "There should be far more involvement and representation from the District Council than at present."

Use of Meetings by Partners and Council Services

79. A common source of dissatisfaction which emerged from the survey of attendees was of presentations and agenda items imposed on LAFs from above¹⁷, and BCC service areas using LAFs to consult the community when sometimes more local and wider consultation was needed¹⁸. It was sometimes unclear what influence, if any, the LAF could have over the items presented. It is important that LAFs have control over agenda content, and participate in agenda setting. However, we heard of potential tension between this and the need for the meetings to meet the needs of the BCC who fund the meetings. Other concerns were raised over the use of very technical language or jargon by officers being off-putting to some attendees
80. LAFs should be used for genuine consultation and to encourage local debate and influence service delivery on topics of local interest. LAFs should be recognised as a gathering of community representatives and not ‘the community’, and hence may not be suitable forums if the aim is to spread information far and wide. It cannot be assumed that information given to LAFs is cascaded down beyond the meeting. More care is needed in how LAFs are used by district and county level organisations. We feel that LAFs should always be made aware of policy changes and initiatives of local significance, but that LAF members and chairmen should have greater control over how much LAF attention these receive depending on local interest, degree of influence, and other community engagement methods available. It is important that the LAF chairmen have the final say on top-down agenda requests, and be supported in this.

LAF Attendance and Representation

81. At some LAFs average attendance over the past two years has been below 14 people, whereas at others it is over 30. The average attendance across all LAFs in this period is 19. LAFs are open to the public (with the exception of Beaconsfield) but generally attendance is very low, with only a few LAFs having regular attendance of between 3-10 members of the public. Specific topics/issues do generate better attendance at some LAFs, with as many as 21 members of the public recorded recently at a High Wycombe LAF meeting. Not all LAF members attend the meetings, and some are not engaged in their LAF at all. This includes some parish councils, county councillors and district councillors. On average, LAF member attendance varies from as many as 24 at Great Brickhill, Wing and Ivinghoe, to as few as 3 in Winslow District, with the average for all LAFs being 11.
82. Evidence collected from the survey of attendees and meetings with the district councils shows an appetite for a greater and broader range of attendance at or input into LAF meetings. This aligns well with the wider Localism ethos and Big Society outcome, and was a notable feature of the community forums we heard about in Wiltshire. Low attendance is likely to inhibit the activities and capabilities of the LAF. The survey of attendees suggests a particular desire to see greater involvement from youth groups, voluntary and community groups and local business representatives. Greater attendance and involvement from the general public is also desired, and this would serve to distinguish LAFs from other council

¹⁷ Reasons given for dissatisfaction with LAFs in the survey of attendees included: “agendas are imposed by the centre. Items they do not wish to discuss are either ignored or ruled out” and LAFs “seems more a tool for top-down dissemination of info rather than bottom-up means of the community getting things done”.

¹⁸ Reasons given for dissatisfaction with LAFs in the survey of attendees included: “There is a tendency for BCC to rely on the LAF and ignore their duty to statutorily consult with town and parish councils”.

meetings where public involvement is more limited. South Bucks and Wycombe District Council representatives were sceptical as to the degree to which LAFs currently forged effective links with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and engaged the general public.

83. Greater and broader input at LAF meetings would increase the degree to which the LAFs are felt to be representative of their local community, enable more informed discussions and decisions, and increase the prospects of effective subgroups and actions being performed by the LAFs. They would also widen the pool of skills and resources available in delivering actions. More representative LAFs would also increase their value and relevance to partner organisations, potentially unlocking greater support of the meetings from them.
84. Greater VCS involvement in LAFs would also encourage better partnership working between them and public service providers which LAFs are currently not considered effective in facilitating (32% of attendees surveyed were dissatisfied with this function), but which is important if better LAF outcomes are to be achieved with minimal additional funding. Greater young people's involvement in LAFs could also deliver wider benefits in terms of their involvement in democracy and the local community. It is worth noting that limited youth involvement in LAFs currently does not appear to translate into low support for youth projects, given a significant proportion of delegated funding in 2011/12 went to these. However we think more youth involvement can only be beneficial to the success of these projects.
85. Two hour long evening meetings may not appeal to everyone, and because of this it may be difficult to achieve greater LAF attendance. For this reason, LAFs should be more robust in ensuring their decisions are well informed by local views and evidence, not simply the views of those present and seek to involve people/groups in the LAF in different ways. To varying degrees councillors already engage their communities outside the LAF meetings and represent them at meetings. Below LAFs there is already range of 'grassroots' activity undertaken which engages communities and draws together their issues. This includes parish/town councils, community groups, Neighbourhood Action Groups and the Revite Groups in Chiltern District. By tying into these existing networks and demonstrating how their issues are feeding up into LAF meetings, LAFs can strengthen their community representativeness. There is also potential for social media to enhance community input into LAFs, and we would encourage LAFs to experiment with this and to be supported in doing so.
86. To address gaps in representation Wiltshire Council has undertaken a 'Wiltshire Voices' project where their LAF equivalents heard from seldom heard groups via audio and visual aids. Gaps in representation could also be addressed by using existing groups or gatherings of those concerned, with either a LAF member attending existing external gatherings, or representatives being invited to attend the LAF where they are able/inclined to. Opportunities exist for encouraging more youth involvement in LAFs via schools, the Youth Cabinet and Youth Parliament. Improved representativeness could also be achieved by LAFs making better use of readily available research data, such as that held on the Buckinghamshire Strategic Partnership website¹⁹ including the BCC resident survey data and any crime data available from the Police. This is particularly helpful in raising awareness of less overt local issues such as social care issues, domestic violence and homelessness.

¹⁹ http://www.buckinghamshirepartnership.gov.uk/partnership/BSP/Public_Home.page?

LAF Meetings Styles and Agendas

87. LAFs aiming to broaden LAF attendance and input should ensure meeting styles are conducive to this. 'Council style' meetings could be off putting to some groups not familiar with such formality and the general public.
88. Some formality may be needed at certain points in LAF meetings, and there have been suggestions some parish councils might prefer the formal meeting style. LAF chairmen should be supported in facilitating and experiment with more flexible and informal meeting styles and agendas, either for the entirety of LAF meetings or for suitable parts of them. Feedback can then be collected as to whether attendees were comfortable with this, and they could see benefits of it
89. Wiltshire Council actively promote more informal meetings of their Area Boards to encourage greater and broader attendance. This included café style meetings, roundtable discussions, handheld voting systems, audio and visual aids. They also produced newsletter style minutes of meetings.
90. For effective and interesting LAF meetings, which will attract good levels of attendance it is important LAFs and their membership take greater ownership of agendas. Some LAFs (such as Greater Aylesbury) demonstrate good practice in this regard where Chairman, vice Chairman and lead area officers, lead agenda setting to ensure meetings are focussed on local priorities and topics of local interest, and matters are suited to discussion and influence at the LAF level. Greater flexibility and variation in agendas is also suggested, and it was suggested at our meeting with Chiltern District Council Representatives that single topic (LAF priority) focussed meetings occasionally would allow more in depth debate and discussion. Meetings may also be made more interesting by avoiding the same regular agenda topic items, such as transport / highway maintenance.
91. One way to improve the ownership of LAF agendas and promote the meetings would be through the use of a publicly accessible and flexible forward plan of future meeting topics. Forward plans are common to other BCC committee meetings, and it was an improvement suggested by some surveyed LAF attendees²⁰. It would help improve the agenda setting process, as well as allow groups and individuals to see what is coming up at meetings in advance, allowing them to be better prepared and ensure availability for the meetings of particular interest.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that each LAF should maintain a public, flexible forward plan of future meeting topics, with greater LAF member ownership of this and input into it.

LAF Chairmen

92. At the Evidence Session the BCC Leader spoke of the need for effective chairmanship at LAFs, and it is clearly a critical factor. 70% of LAF attendees surveyed were satisfied with their chairman, and the case studies on page 15

²⁰ Reasons given for dissatisfaction with LAFs in the survey of attendees included: "There needs to be forward planning to identify when in the annual cycle of meetings Information gathering, priority setting, actioning of priority initiatives, and the review of outcomes are undertaken".

highlight some good practice. On the other hand Chairmen were also a source of dissatisfaction among some survey respondents who among other things questioned the commitment of some to the LAF concept, not being prepared at meetings and making unilateral decisions for the group. Chairmen also can play a key role in remedying some of the identified deficiencies of LAFs such as agenda management, meeting content, fairness, keeping party politics out of meetings and inclusivity to name but a few.

93. The survey of attendees showed support (55% in favour, with 36% against) for the chairman role to be opened up to non-county councillors, although it should be noted that only five county councillors took part in this survey. Allowing other LAF members to chair meetings would increase the number of candidates from which LAF members could select their chairman, as well as increase the perception of the meeting being more of an equal partnership and less of a county council meeting. In parts of Kent where county and district councils such as Swale Borough support their LAF equivalents (Local Engagement Forums) the chairman role is performed by a borough councillor and vice-chair by a county councillor.
94. On the other hand, having a non-county councillor chairman does not reflect the reality that the meetings are largely supported by BCC and delegated funding entirely so, with to date no other partners putting significant levels of their own resources in. It could also undermine the county council's efforts to promote their members as local community leaders.
95. Overall we could not come to a unanimous view on whether the chairman role should be opened up, to either district councillors or to all LAF members, as the evidence was mixed. The matter should not be ignored however, and we feel the Locality Strategy refresh should consult more widely on this, and consider the best way forward to support the wider strategy. To assist LAF chairmen in their role and enable them to be as effective as possible training and guidance should be offered to all LAF chairmen, and best practice shared among them.

Councillor Attendance

96. To be effective LAFs require engagement and attendance from all elected representatives in the local area. Currently not all county councillors²¹, let alone their district counterparts, attend LAFs regularly and this should be addressed. Data held by the Localities Team indicate some parish councils have never been engaged in LAFs, while others send representatives very infrequently, and others have attended but have become disengaged.
97. Low and inconsistent attendance by elected representatives undermines how representative LAFs can claim to be, and reduces their value to the public service providers who support them, as well as other attendees. Work is required to understand why some County Councillors do not engage more with their LAF, and for this to be encouraged. We think the County Council's Member Development Group should consider how best to raise the expectation that members will attend most LAF meetings where possible, and engage with the LAF when they can't attend. To encourage better attendance, support the LAF chairmen and address

²¹ County councillor LAF attendance. The latest available attendance data for the past two LAFs in each area shows a county councillor attendance rate of 57%.

some areas of dissatisfaction currently with LAFs, relevant content should be included in member training and induction programmes.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that Cabinet ensures that the BCC member development programme, particularly the induction programme for new members, provides clear guidance and support to members in their community leadership role, including expectations and advice on their involvement in LAFs.

Raising the Profile of LAFs

98. The most common suggestion among LAF attendees surveyed for improving how representative LAFs were, was to raise their profile and increase community awareness and involvement. At the Evidence Session we heard from VCS representatives who felt LAFs needed to publicise themselves and their achievements more, and South Bucks District Council were concerned community groups were not aware of LAFs.
99. Some LAFs already take active steps to promote their activity and community involvement. For example, the participatory budget projects in greater Aylesbury and Wendover are already raising the LAF profile and occasionally a LAF agenda item will encourage a boost in local interest.
100. There is scope for further steps to promote involvement in LAFs. For example annual local area debates and reports by LAFs on their achievements and aims for the year would help raise their profile and stimulate interest. LAF outcomes should be easily accessible via the LAF web pages to promote LAFs, but also to share good practice across the LAFs. Information on LAFs should be available in public places (e.g. libraries), and the local media should be engaged to promote LAF activity.
101. To boost the LAF profile and reinvigorate them there may be benefit in rebranding them if a number of the improvements suggested in this report were implemented, particularly if their role and purpose is revised and clarified. We also think a consistent name for the meetings would be beneficial too so as not to undermine their profile and avoid any confusion.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that Cabinet rebrands and re-launches LAFs to reinforce any changes made to the role of LAFs detailed in the new Locality Strategy.

Conclusion

102. We think LAFs should continue in some form because the concept remains a good method for delivering localism in Buckinghamshire and empowering local communities. There is some good practice in LAFs which we have highlighted in this report, but there is also scope for improvement enabling LAFs to fulfil their potential. Generally those that attend are fairly satisfied with them. However we feel the current method of delivery needs improvement, to ensure LAFs make a greater contribution to delivering localism.
103. We see the following as key characteristics of a successful LAF, some of which are already evident in Buckinghamshire:
- A clear and shared sense of purpose
 - A willingness by the LAF to deliver actions outside meetings to tackle their own local issues
 - Leadership by the LAF Chairman
 - Good attendance and involvement by partners, councillors, parish and town councils, and the wider community.
 - Strong links between the LAF Community Plan/priorities and the service delivery and strategies of BCC services and those of our partners.
 - A focus on clear priorities based on broad community engagement
 - Innovation in practice
 - Flexibility in meeting styles
 - A high profile with awareness of LAF meetings and achievements among the VCS and local community.
104. We have suggested a revised core aim for LAFs and supporting ToR based around LAFs taking action and influencing service delivery to improve local services. We hope this will serve as a useful starting point for discussions on the revised BCC Locality Strategy and LAF role in this. Alongside this, the review has suggested a number of practical improvements to LAF meetings with regard to meeting style, chairmanship, attendance, agendas, profile and processes.
105. Future enhancement of LAFs will rely on the LAF members and their support for the concept and objective. It is the LAF members who will determine how meetings should operate, the LAF sense of purpose and outcomes. Recognising this, we feel strongly that any changes to LAFs detailed in this report should be implemented in consultation with partners and attendees. It is important that the LAFs are given the opportunity to comment on the report findings and the suggested improvements, and for these to be considered in the refresh of the Locality Strategy. Councillors across the three tiers must be comfortable with any changes, otherwise chairmen and locality staff will struggle to improve the LAF operation.
106. We would like the current issues with LAFs identified in this report to be considered during the revision of the BCC Locality Strategy. In revising the Locality Strategy we would suggest the following:
- That the Strategy outline how LAFs are to develop in future to provide clarification for partners.
 - That the strategy be developed with partners (such as the district councils, Police, Health Service and the Voluntary and Community Sector organisations) to secure

alignment of the strategy with those of its partners, explore areas of joint working/delivery and the sharing of resources to support locality working.

- Assess the suitability of the current Local Community Area boundaries.
- Clarify the corporate position on the devolution of service delivery and budget to lower levels such as LAFs and parish councils, and implement measures that ensure service areas pursue this.
- Identify ways the influence exerted by LAFs on service delivery agencies and their plans can be made more visible and obvious.
- Re-examine how delegated funding allocations are determined, reflecting the varying size and need of the local community areas.

Acknowledgements

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Steve Milton from Wiltshire Council.

Members of the BCC Localities Team, particularly Rebecca Carley.

Attendees of our Evidence Session on the 28th May 2012.

Representatives from the four District Councils who met with us during the review.

All the people who took the time to complete our survey or write to us directly to share their views on LAFs during this review. Particular thanks goes to those parish councils who shared their thoughts on LAFs with us via the survey and in writing.

Appendices

A - Local Area Forum Review Scope

Review purpose / Terms of reference	To clarify the existing role and purpose of LAFs, and assess how effectively they are performing. Examine the future changing role and function of LAFs within the context of the changes in public service delivery in the county.
Key questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the emerging or expected key changes in local public service delivery in the next 5 years in Bucks? • What role could LAFs play to support locality working in this future service delivery? • How should the original LAF objectives as defined in the 2008 Localities Strategy change to support the future LAF role? • How are LAFs currently performing against their recommended objectives? • What changes are required to the current LAF system to support them in performing their future role? <p>In understanding what future role LAFs can perform, their current performance and future changes required the review will need to examine examples of locality working outside the county.</p> <p>The review will also be mindful of any budget implications for any changes to the LAF system.</p>
Out of scope	A wider review of the Localities Strategy – LAFs are an integral part of the current strategy, so any issues/observations with wider relevance to the broader strategy should be noted and recommended to be addressed by a subsequent Localities Strategy review.
Anticipated Outcomes	Evidence-based recommendations on how the County Council should amend the LAF objectives, and how it should support them to fulfil their current and future roles.

B: Community Forums Arrangements in Other Local Authority Areas

Authority	Unitary or two tier	Sub-district Forums	Information
Hertfordshire	Two-tier	X	<p>Have locality budgets – each member £10k approx and receive applications. Highways locality budget for each member to allocate.</p> <p>http://www.hertsdirect.org/your-council/councillors/localitybudgetscheme/</p>
Kent	Two-tier	✓	<p>Local Board (generally for Councillors) and Local Engagement Forum (LEF) (for community engagement) arrangement in place, but arrangements vary greatly across the County depending on the district. Forums have been piloted in all areas but since adoption in 2003/4, and depending on local county and district councillor support for them they have either not continued, continued with joint support, or continued with only the support of either the district or county. Local councillor discretion as to how they operate (delegated funding amounts and allocation method, meeting frequency, attendees etc).</p> <p>Details: Kent.gov.uk/community_engagement/local_board_member</p> <p>Shepway, Gravesham, Dover, Dartford districts have LEFs but operation of all varies.</p> <p>Local Boards vary also in terms of whether they are held at all and if they are open to the public.</p> <p>Some LEFs which have district support have district councillors as the chairman, and county councillor as the vice chairman, and are supported financially and with staff jointly by the district and county.</p> <p>No internal review has been conducted in recent years on the LEF operation, although some districts (such as Swale) do conduct annual reviews (2011/12 report online as a paper from Cabinet meeting 16/3/2011).</p>

Leicestershire	Two-tier	✓	25 community forums covering Leicestershire. County, District, Parish and other agencies (police, health). Open to public. Have a forum budget (some £320k), with each forum getting £10-15k depending on population. Budget process – public can put forward project, comment on projects, vote by booking a space on local decision night. Meet 2-4 times a year, each has a public question time slot, can request topics for discussion, can check progress of any follow up actions on web. Can request other orgs being invited.
Oxfordshire	Two-tier	x	Less formal support for localism. Grants (Big Society Active Communities Grant) given to local community groups / partnerships to develop their own needs assessment, shared priorities and action plan.
Shropshire	Unitary	✓	http://www.shropshireljcs.com/local-joint-committees/brown-lee-ljc/about-your-ljc Have 28 local joint committees covering whole county. Meet several times a year. Voting rights for all councillors and parish councils in area.
Surrey	Two-tier	X	11 Local Committees (one for each borough), meet 3-4 times /yr, each made up of the county and borough councillors in area, discuss education, young people & transport. Support community activities through county councillors local member allocation fund. Supported by Community Partnerships Team. (budget - each councillor has £8,410 revenue for local projects, and the committee has £35k capital in 11/12)
Warwickshire	Two-tier	✓	Some 30 community forums (across 5 districts). Districts have funding pot/grants from district and county councils for forum to distribute to local groups/individuals that support forum priorities. Public meetings, held 4 times /yr. Attended by councillors, police and other public orgs. Locality Working Strategy very similar in its aims to Bucks. Number of forums exceeds number of localities. Established 2008.
Wiltshire	Unitary	✓	18 Area Boards. Local councillors and 1 cabinet member at each meeting plus town & parish councils, police, local NHS. Meet every 6-8wks, public. Councillors make decisions. Each has budget to support community/local groups. Way for local people to shape policies of council and partners. Public can propose issues to discuss, and for board to make decision on. Issues received are published on website. Petitions can be presented. Voting but councillors have final say.

C: Summary of LAF Review Meetings with District Council representatives

During May 2012 members of the LAF Task and Finish Group met in four separate meetings with representatives from the District Councils in the county. Senior officer and member attendance was requested to give an overview of the District Council's views and positions on the LAFs.

It is accepted that the views expressed don't necessarily represent the views of all district councillors or even the official view of the respective councils. What the meetings have done is flag up common issues and matters that should be addressed as part of the continued development of the LAFs.

It should also be noted that whilst some of the District Council representatives regularly attended LAFs, and in some case more than one LAF, some did not or only had direct experience of only one LAF.

Meeting attendees

District Council	District Council Representatives	Task and Finish Group Members	BCC Officers
Aylesbury Vale	Cllr Pam Pearce (Cabinet Member Community Matters) Matthew Partridge	Cllr Mary Baldwin Cllr Jenny Puddefoot	James Povey
Chiltern	Cllr Mimi Harker (Cabinet Member Young People, Leisure, Community & Communications) Cllr Nick Rose (Leader) Martin Holt	Cllr Brian Roberts Cllr Noel Brown	Christine Gardner (Locality Manager), James Povey
South Bucks	Cllr Anita Cranmer (Cabinet Member Community) Rachel Winfield	Cllr Mary Baldwin Cllr Bill Lidgate	James Povey
Wycombe	Cllr David Shakespeare (Cabinet Member Big Society & Localism) Charles Meakings	Cllr Brian Roberts Cllr Paul Rogerson	James Povey

Key Issues

Variable LAF support by District Councils	Both in terms of officer attendance and member attendance (at least 3 of the 5 district members we spoke to were not regular attendees). SBDC sends the same lead officer to every LAF and historically there has been good officer support for LAF issues raised. AVDC also supportive providing lead area officers, and AVDC update papers at LAFs. CDC – Only recently have become more supportive of LAFs. Officer attendance depends on agenda, but do present papers, and have expressed willingness to support fourth LAF meeting if this was cut. WDC – Officer attendance depends on agenda, previous regular senior officer attendance stopped due to topics, and LAF issues coming up at other alternative forums.
Uncertainty	In some form this issue came up at every meeting.

<p>over the role / purpose of LAFs</p>	<p>SBDC felt they needed a clear purpose and that current aims were confused. Felt the apparent aims did not match current method.</p> <p>AVDC did not feel all the originally intended LAF objectives were being achieved, and queried if chairs and attendees fully understood these. Matters discussed had to pitched at right (sub district) level, not too local or too high level, and should focus on topics than can be influenced.</p> <p>CDC – uncertainty over LAF purpose with some LAFs being very active and some delivering limited functions of grant giving and information dissemination. These limited functions could be delivered better using other methods. Need to get better outcomes from LAF activities.</p> <p>WDC – High Wycombe LAF seems to duplicate HW Town Committee. Unparished area issue means the two cant be merged, although are trying back to back meetings. LAF aspirations very broad and perhaps need more clarity. Not clear on role and hence the overall value of a sub district forum.</p> <p>Depending on what role is decided, this will have implications for who should attend, the size of meetings, the support required, officer attendance etc.</p> <p>A clearer and unique purpose would help reduce criticism over it being an unnecessary extra layer and duplicating other forums/meetings/methods.</p>
<p>LAF processes, petition issues, presentations</p>	<p>AVDC highlighted need for LAF processes (such as in how priorities set) to be consistent in their quality, and to be seen as fair and ensure wide buy in achieved.</p> <p>WDC – LAF role in petitions perhaps needs clarification as being heard twice now some are going to LAF and direct to council.</p>
<p>Insufficient budget delegated</p>	<p>SBDC felt funding broken down to only allow funding of very small initiatives, pooled at the district level could achieve more.</p> <p>WDC – More delegated budget needed to get greater buy in / involvement.</p>
<p>Representativeness</p>	<p>SBDC felt public and Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) not encouraged to participate.</p> <p>WDC sceptical on degree to which LAFs facilitate VCS links and public engagement, and that committee style attracts only certain types of people comfortable with this. Should explore other methods to engage community and youth groups.</p> <p>AVDC – sceptical if ever get great public involvement, and perhaps Parish Councils (PCs) or other methods need to be relied on for this input.</p>
<p>Public attendance /profile issues</p>	<p>SBDC concerned that community forums set up with BCC and Community Impact Bucks were not aware of LAF meetings and funding. LAFs need to spread by word of mouth to boost attendance.</p> <p>AVDC – agenda must be interesting to widen attendance.</p> <p>CDC could see benefit in more VCS and public attendance/input into LAFs.</p>

Meeting style	LAF Meetings too 'council like' and formal (voting rights an example). Mentioned by all that this could be off putting to some groups, but AVDC suggested some PCs prefer this formality.
LAF meeting language and atmosphere	AVDC – important that meetings avoid jargon and officer speak, so as not to put off PCs and wider audience. CDC – Member attitude to each other, and using 'partnership language' important to foster more of partnership feel at LAFs.
Agenda (content and DC involvement)	SBDC officer had not been invited to be involved in agenda setting. AVDC suggested the degree to which they had input into agendas could be variable also. Certainly did so at the Greater Aylesbury LAF (GALAF) to good effect, but perhaps not at all. AVDC pointed to their update provided to each LAF as having succeeded in broadening the LAF topic agenda, and resulting in more involvement from their officers at meetings. Suggested a focus on single topics at LAFs would enable more in depth discussions and interest, and that didn't always need to feature a transportation slot. A Public forward plan informed by priorities would assist agenda setting and in generating interest. CDC felt a topic focussed meeting could also reduce officer attendance required. WDC – felt LAFs had a very BCC issue dominated agenda. Had opportunity to influence agenda but attendees more concerned with BCC work.
DC members involved / welcome More equal partnership forum and less BCC	SBDC view that LAFs were imposed and not an equal partnership. Whereas felt the SB Strategic Partnership was more equal. Felt LAF terms of reference gave impression they were BCC led. AVDC felt welcome and involved, certainly at the GALAF, where have regular meeting slots to provide updates. But this is not the case at all LAFs. Overall didn't feel LAFs were too BCC. Wondered if District Councillor views/buy in varied depending if they were twin hatters. CDC – Seems a 'BCC' LAF and should be branded better as a CDC and BCC LAF. Would then get better buy in from District Councillors. Also needs to be reflected in BCC Members language. LAF seen as BCC member surgery currently. Culture change needed, and LAF chairs need to discuss matter with District Members to get better buy in. WDC – LAFs are seen as a BCC thing, naturally as BCC pay for and support. For this reason seems right chair should be BCC member.
Chair skill / ability	Cited as an issue by all and linked to some other issues raised. AVDC – Need for skilled chairperson to tackle issues over meeting content, and dominance by certain groups/individuals.
Loud voices dominate	SBDC highlighted some LAFs being dominated by more confident and well organised groups. AVDC also highlighted at some LAFs that loud voices dominate,
Legacy issues of pathfinder,	CDC – some issues of LAFs having been imposed and PCs having been alienated. Also that they ignored existing community engagement infrastructure in place, and there are some issues with the LAF

<p>distrust</p> <p>PC involvement and buy in</p>	<p>community boundaries.</p> <p>SBDC felt parish clerks were nervous of working with BCC and there were trust issues. Also that PCs felt they were losing their autonomy and didn't like how they'd been grouped into local communities. AVDC would like all PCs involved and that work is required to engage and encourage low/non attendees to have greater input. WDC – There are community boundary issues but any changes now would need to be informed by whatever role LAFs should perform. Some PCs have perceived LAFs as a BCC takeover, but are starting to see them as an opportunity.</p>
<p>More support for LAFs needed</p>	<p>SBDC pointed to greater efforts needed to join LAFs up with VCS network, which could be achieved with greater Locality Manager resourcing.</p> <p>AVDC concerned if BCC support for LAF wanes, other partners will quickly follow.</p> <p>CDC were very positive about the work of their BCC Locality Manager who has links with local community groups and is aided in this by the existing CDC support infrastructure in place (Revite groups and their communities team) and her co-location sat with the CDC communities team on some days. CDC felt strongly that there must be grassroots engagement initiatives such as community appraisals underpinning LAFs, which can help bring people to them. Co-location means the LAF activity is tied in with all the work, issues & data collected by the CDC community team.</p>
<p>LAF positive examples</p>	<p>All could point to good examples of LAF work and them making a difference.</p> <p>SBDC on Wexham Park Hospital parking issues.</p> <p>AVDC felt LAFs had an important role as a networking forum for the 3 tiers of council and partners, and were delivering on local focus for discussion providing discussions were pitched at appropriate level.</p> <p>CDC recognised their value in joining things up and getting projects moving, and legitimising grassroots issues gathered so they can influence BCC services.</p> <p>WDC see LAFs as secondary tool for consulting community, but considered primary value to be bringing the 3 tiers of local government together.</p> <p>And most acknowledged the LAFs were good in principle (except SB) but were there was room for improvement.</p>

Prospects for future increased LAF support from District Councils

SBDC: Before can support more, current issues with LAFs need resolving. SBDC size limits the extent to which they could provide significant additional staff or funding support. Don't currently delegate funding in the district and size of this probably would not be meaningful in any case.

AVDC: Positive on LAFs, and have been from outset. Their Corporate Plan Community Engagement Action Plan, and current officer discussions taking place could mean greater support for LAFs could be forthcoming in the future. Feel LAFs do serve important functions.

Felt a role that LAFs could perform could be assessing future impact of various changes in public service delivery, identifying issues and resolving possible issues before service plans are implemented. Linked to original LAF objective to better coordinate partner service delivery, which was felt to be currently lacking.

CDC: Felt that some of good examples of LAF working where action had been achieved (e.g. community transport work) could open the door to greater partnership working and pooling of budgets, alongside collocation of officers and shared support. Sceptical of benefit in LAFs having delegated decision making powers from CDC as District and Parish layers in place for this, but see role in them informing service provision.

WDC: Didn't feel LAFs had developed how they should but supported principles, and could see logic in being more involved given current economic/policy climate. Would need to know more about how LAFs set to develop in future and their role/purpose before WDC could look at supporting more than they do.

South Bucks

A feeling that a district wide LAF would be better / merged with the Strategic Partnership persists in the District. Pointed to partners and VCS not having the capacity to engage in LAFs. Feelings remain that LAFs were imposed on them, and feedback from some PCs is that they are not comfortable with them. A feeling that SBucks is unique to the rest of the county in terms of its large parish sizes, and so no need for a sub district tier.

A written response received from both Denham and Gerrards Cross Parish Councils echoes these points. Denham also added it is a burden on District Councillors with many covering more than one LAF. Whilst supporting good work relationships between county and parishes Denham PC does not feel a one size system fits all areas of the county.

***BCC Cabinet Member Martin Phillips report on South Bucks LAF situation (Nov 2011)* concluded that retaining the status quo to be way forward in the short term, given that although there was a fairly even split in the Parish Councils favouring the LAF system and those wanting a district LAF/Local Strategic Partnership merge, the Parish Councils in favour of LAFs represented a significantly larger proportion of the population.

D: Papers and Minutes from Task and Finish Group Meetings

2nd May 2012, LAF Review Progress Meeting

<http://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=741&MId=5212>

At this meeting members of the Task and Finish Group heard evidence about Wiltshire Council's Area Boards, which are similar in their objectives and delivery to LAFs. Members also received an update on evidence already collected, and commented on evidence planned for collection.

Papers include:

- Background paper on Wiltshire Council's Area Boards for agenda item 3.
- LAF Costs summary note for agenda item 5.
- LAF Attendance data for agenda item 5.

28th May, LAF Review Evidence Session

<http://democracy.buckscc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=741&MId=5213>

At this all day evidence session members of the Task and Finish Group questioned the County Council's leadership, representatives from County Council service areas, representatives from the Police, Health Service, Voluntary and Community Sector, and the Councils Localities Team.

Papers include:

- LAF Review online survey results summary
- Written representation received from members of the Youth Parliament

E: Local Area Forum delegated budget spending 2011/12 by project type (provisional)

Community Capacity			
Scheme	Local Area	Requested	Agreed Amount
Building Community Capacity in Chesham and the Villages	Chesham & the Chiltern Villages	5000	5000
Free one hour parking Chalfont St Giles	The Chalfonts	5,000	5,000
Missendens Parking Strategy	The Missendens	3300	3300
Hedgerley Parish Council	Gerrards Cross	1,250	1,250
Richings Park Library	Wexham & Ivers	1,300	1,300
Subsidy for Sunday evening service on Bus route 35	Chepping Wye Valley	1776	1,776
Risborough Community Bus	North West Chilterns	10,000	10,000
Contribution to Maidenhead/Marlow Branch Line promotional brochure	South West Chilterns & Marlow	1000	1000
	Total 8 Projects	28626	28626
Community Safety			
Scheme	Local Area	Requested	Agreed Amount
CSP River Misbourne path and low level lighting	The Chalfonts	3,000	2000
VAS Seer Green	The Chalfonts	7,000	306
FQP - potential for extending pilot FQP project	Great Brickhill, Wing & Ivinghoe	5000	5000
Thames Valley Police- 'Burglary Kits'	Wexham & Ivers	2,875	1,200
Traffic Regulation Order	High Wycombe	4000	4,000
Grit Bin	High Wycombe	450	450
Grit bin for Chippendale Close	High Wycombe	450	450
Mobile VAS unit for Princes Risborough NAG/Town Council	North West Chilterns	4000	4000
Mobile VAS unit for Hughenden Parish Council	North West Chilterns	5000	5000
Speeding Awareness stickers for Princes Risborough Outer NAG	North West Chilterns	750	750
Medmenham Parish Council permanent VAS	South West Chilterns & Marlow	7800	7800
Community Speedwatch	Waddesdon	2500	2500
	Total 12 Projects	42,825	33456
Community Cohesion - Intergenerational			
Scheme	Local Area	Requested	Agreed Amount
Community Arts Quilt Project	Chesham & the Chiltern Villages	2750	1450

Chesham pilot art trail	Chesham & the Chiltern Villages	2100	2000
Badminton equipment for Ashley green activities	Chesham & the Chiltern Villages	321	321
CREC - contribution to project worker salary	Chesham & the Chiltern Villages	1700	1700
Chiltern Heights Health Fair	The Chalfonts	360	360
Chiltern Heights Exercise Classes	The Chalfonts	460	460
Community Writes project	Great Brickhill, Wing & Ivinghoe	1000	1000
Gerrards Cross Short Mat Bowls Club	Gerrards Cross	927	927
Denham Cricket Club	Gerrards Cross	2,000	2,000
BME Parents Conference	High Wycombe	600	600
Town Centre Horticultural project	High Wycombe	7500	2,500
Total 11 Projects		19718	13318
Environmental Improvements			
Scheme	Local Area	Requested	Agreed Amount
Weston Turville tennis courts	Wendover	400	400
Citizens Advice Bureau Disabled ramp and outdoor works	Amersham	3500.00	3500
St Michael's Church Forecourt, Amersham on the Hill	Amersham	5000.00	4000
Parking scheme for Devonshire Avenue, Amersham	Amersham	2700.00	2700
Forty Green Access, Penn Parish Ciouncil	Amersham	5000.00	5000
Britain in Bloom. Amersham Town Council.	Amersham	1000.00	1000
Citizens Advice Bureau	Chesham & the Chiltern Villages	5000	5000
Cholesbury Village Hall toilet refurb incl disabled facilities	Chesham & the Chiltern Villages	500	500
CSP Jubilee Garden	The Chalfonts	4,000	1840
Citizens Advice Bureau Disabled ramp and outdoor works	The Missendens	2000	2000
Aston Abbotts footpath	Great Brickhill, Wing & Ivinghoe	8100	8100
Barkham Close signs	Great Brickhill, Wing & Ivinghoe	400	1400
Beeches Cycling Infrastructure Improvements	Beeches	12,200	12,200
Beaconsfield Sports Pitches Enhancements	Beaconsfield	10,000	10,000
Dropped Kerbs	Gerrards Cross	4,440.80	3,823
Gerrards Cross Parish Council- bus stop	Gerrards Cross	7,200	7,200
Fulmer Parish Council	Gerrards Cross	7,000	3,700
Friends of Langley Park - tools for horticultural planting project	Wexham & Ivers	2,000	500
Total 18 Projects		80440.8	72863
Community Cohesion Young People			
Scheme	Local Area	Requested	Agreed Amount
Activities for young people in the Wendover local area (AVYFC running in conjunction with AVDC)	Wendover	5500	5500
Bucks 2012 Paralympic sport taster programme or activities with schools	Wendover	4500	4500

Amazing Donkeys	Wendover	429.85	429.85
Supporting young carers - Carers Bucks	Wendover	1506.97	1506.97
Wendover Parish climbing wall	Wendover	988.56	988.56
Thames Valley Police	Wendover	362.18	362.18
Wendover Youth Club	Wendover	702.99	702.99
Aston Clinton Youth Club	Wendover	529.35	529.35
Aston Clinton and Wendover Youth Support	Wendover	2000.5	2000.5
Weston Turville play equipment	Wendover	512.44	512.44
Activities for 8-17 year olds in Amersham (3 separate schemes) run by CDC/Nexus.	Amersham	984.00	800
Adizone Multi-Games Area, King George V Field, Amersham on the Hill	Amersham	5000.00	4000
CDC/Nexus youth activities (5 schemes)	Chesham & the Chiltern Villages	1818	1818.05
Whelpley Hill Village Hall Multi-Sports Sessions	Chesham & the Chiltern Villages	750	750
Waterside youth engagement	Chesham & the Chiltern Villages	500	500
Renovation and Replacement of Playground equipment - The Lee Parish Council	Chesham & the Chiltern Villages	700	700
CDC/Nexus youth activities in the Chalfonts area (6 separate schemes covering Chalfont St Giles, Chalfont St Peter, Little Chalfont and Seer Green)	The Chalfonts	5,340	5,340
Chalfont St Giles Youth Club	The Chalfonts	5,000	5,000
Continuation of Street Dreams project on the Prestwood Estate	The Missendens	5000	5000
Activities for 5-13 year olds in Hyde Heath and Prestwood (3 separate schemes) Only Girls Hockey Project funded.	The Missendens	1543	903
Connect 4 children and young people: Playzone Motor Project	The Missendens	5000	2500
connect 4 children and young people: Playzone Motor Project	The Missendens		2500
Prestwood Colts and Girls Football Club	The Missendens	2500	2500
Childrens Playground Little Missenden	The Missendens	500	500
Activities for young people	Great Brickhill, Wing & Ivinghoe	5500	5500
Aylesbury Youth Action project to encourage volunteering	Greater Aylesbury	1000	1000
Emergency accommodation project for young people in Aylesbury	Greater Aylesbury	5000	5000
Bucks 2012 Our place project	Greater Aylesbury	1750	1750
Bucks 2012 Driving Inspiration artwork (£2,000)	Greater Aylesbury	2000	2000
Funding to assist development of business plan for Welsh Crescent film project	Greater Aylesbury	250	250
Dissemination of information ref Ashmead School project	Greater Aylesbury	500	500
Bucks 2012 Paralympic Sport Taster Programme	Greater Aylesbury	3000	3000
Event funding ref Olympics/Stoke Mandeville	Greater Aylesbury	2500	2500
Beeches Cycling training award	Beeches	10,000	2,800
The Burnham Youth Club	Beeches	7,800	5,000
Curzon Centre Youth Youth Leadership programme	Beaconsfield	10,000	10,000

Butterflys preschool outdoor play area, Harvey Memorial Hall	Wexham & Ivers	10,000	8,000
Delaford Colts- storage container	Wexham & Ivers	4,560	4,560
Wexham Youth Project- Action4Youth	Wexham & Ivers	4,360	4,140
St Peters Football Club (Based at RPSC)	Wexham & Ivers	1,353	300
Bourne End Youth Club	Chepping Wye Valley	5000	5,000
Flackwell Heath BMX track improvements	Chepping Wye Valley	2574	2574
3xBlue Light Plus courses	Chepping Wye Valley	10500	10,500
Additonal copies of Addaction film	Chepping Wye Valley	150	150
Fresh Start Project	High Wycombe	5000	7,500
Youth Sounds Musichoir project	High Wycombe	2899	2,899
East Side Youth Club	High Wycombe	1601	1,000
Additonal copies of Addaction film	High Wycombe	150	150
Additonal copies of Addaction film	North West Chilterns	150	150
Additional copies of Addaction film	South West Chilterns & Marlow	220	220
Girl Guiding and Action 4 Youth Volunteering support and training porject	South West Chilterns & Marlow	10,100	10,100
Aylesbury Youth for Christ	Greater Aylesbury	2,500	2,500
Musichoir project from Soundstudio	South West Chilterns & Marlow	468	468
	Total 53 Projects	162552.89	149,355
Community Cohesion Older People			
Scheme	Local Area	Requested	Agreed Amount
Old Friends/Luncheon club	Wendover	891.04	891.04
Pond Park Community Assoc to run gentle exercise classes for Older People to the end of March	Chesham & the Chiltern Villages	261	261
Winter warmth project	Greater Aylesbury	4000	4000
Age Concern Denham	Gerrards Cross	1,100	1,100
Golden Age Tea and Dance and MissOPAG	The Missendens	800	800
	Total 5 Projects	7052.04	7052.04

F: Review of LAFs in South Bucks by BCC

Cabinet Member for Communities, Martin Phillips, November 2011.

Following the change in leadership at Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC), many of the BCC members in the South Bucks District (SBD) area were keen for the new Cabinet member for Communities, Martin Phillips, to review the Local Area Forums (LAF's) in South Bucks.

Subsequently a consultation and review was conducted on two different levels;

1. At the request of the South Bucks Partnership (SBP) all Parishes in the SBD were asked to feedback their formal positions concerning the LAF's to the SBP.
2. Martin Phillips and the Locality Manager arranged individual meetings with many of the Parish Councils, either at the formal Parish Council meetings or informal meetings with the Chair/Vice Chair and clerk.

Feedback to the SBP

At the July 2011 South Bucks Partnership meeting, a short discussion took place on Local Area Forums (LAF's). It was agreed that parish and town councils in South Bucks should take the opportunity to look once more at this issue and in particular be asked to consider whether they wish to continue with separate LAF's in South Bucks or whether the preference is for the South Bucks Partnership to fulfil the role of bringing all parishes together with the District and County as well as other sectors such as business, police and fire and the voluntary sector. All Town and Parish Councils were asked to feedback their formal position on LAF's.

The feedback from Parishes showed an even split. With Beaconsfield, Wexham, Iver, Burnham, Stoke Poges, Fulmer all stating they want to status quo, i.e. four LAF areas within South bucks, to remain. With Farnham Royal, Taplow, Dorney, Denham, Gerrards Cross and Hedgerley voting for an alternative structure; for a single LAF for all twelve town/parish councils.

The even split makes it difficult for BCC to create a structure that will be satisfactory to all. However the parishes voting to retain the current structure represent the larger portion of the population of the SBD area.

Despite some resistance in the SBD towards LAF's, three of the four local areas in the District still have a functioning LAF. Beyond South Bucks, all other local areas have a functioning LAF.

The need for LAF's: Localism

From April 2011, the public service model has been moving to a "Big Society - Small Government" approach with less central targets and monitoring, and increased power given back via councils to communities with a cut in bureaucracy to facilitate this. Various statutory rights will be given via the Localism Bill to enable this shift and to help local people become involved in shaping local priorities and running local services. Community groups and volunteers will and have been enabled to take over some libraries, parks, leisure facilities and transport, as well as parents being able to set up 'free' schools. More

information will be made available, and already local government spending is being published via the internet on <http://whatis.spotlightsonspend.org.uk/>

The Localism Bill will provide the regulatory framework to enable the Big Society concept. This covers new freedoms and flexibility for local government, new rights and powers for communities, reform of the planning system and reform of housing decision making.

Local authorities also have a statutory Duty to consult widely across business, residential, voluntary and community sectors. The LAF concept was intended to assist towards achieving this. Parish councils have a huge role to play in this, the LAF structure creates a localised forum with the three tiers of local leadership all around the table making key decisions for their locality. The structure is designed to create a forum for all key local stakeholders and voices to be heard and involved in decision making in their local area.

Some parishes have questioned why the LAF cannot go back to operating on a district basis, like the Local Area Committee. For BCC to move from the current four local areas within the South Bucks district back to one local area would see BCC working in the opposite direction of the national Localism bill, which is steering Local Government towards working in smaller more localised areas.

BCC's locality working is not limited just to the LAF's, there is a broader strategy around working at more of a local level to ensure services across the board are more tailored to meet local needs, this includes developing individual relationships with each of the Parish Councils outside of the LAF's so that Locality Services can support work in a broader sense within different communities.

Funding

Questions have been raised about the amount of funds available through the LAF's, with suggestions of the sums not being significant enough to justify the number of meetings. Each LAF has two pots of money. The Local Priorities budget of £20, 000: which the LAF decides the criteria for and the delegated transport budget of £23, 000. Each LAF has a total of £43, 000 per annum to allocate. Currently all funds invested in the LAF's come from BCC, in the absence of the LAF BCC would decide how to spend these funds without consulting with colleagues from District and Parish Councils. The LAF's create an opportunity for BCC to make collaborative decisions on how to spend these funds. So whilst some have suggested the LAF's undermine the Parish Councils, this would demonstrate the complete opposite; the LAF's empower the Parish Council's to be involved in a decision making process, in the absence of which BCC would be forced to make decisions about different localities as BCC see fit.

Local Area Arrangements

Many questions have been asked about how areas have been grouped together, as often the areas grouped together are geographically diverse. Areas are not grouped together based on their profile, rather by how people are understood to access services. Whilst this is not an exact science and some area groupings may not be ideal, the local areas were identified as they are after much research and deliberation, and we believe each of the areas to be workable arrangements.

Some have suggested setting up a separate LAF like meeting including those parishes who are not currently involved in LAF's. The idea of the LAF's is to group neighbouring parishes whose resident's access services in the same way together. The suggested alternative arrangement is not built on this concept and therefore does not fulfil the

objectives of the LAF. And if Parishes are willing to join this alternative structure, it's difficult to reason why they are then unwilling to join the existing arrangement.

Proposals

Having consulted with Parishes either via the SBP or through individual meetings, BCC recommends the following suggestions to move forward:

- **More autonomy for LAF's**

The new Cabinet acknowledge that each local area is different and therefore has different needs. Each LAF should therefore make decisions to meet the needs of their area in terms of the format, length and frequency of meetings, as well as who attends. However the cabinet member would ask that all LAF's produce priorities that their LAF is focusing on.

- **Less meetings**

Often the number of meetings the LAF has per year has been questioned, previously the LAF's met four times a year, BCC now recommend the LAF meets three times a year, in some areas the LAF only meets twice a year whilst others have still chosen to meet four times a year, this is a decision each individual LAF can take to best meet their needs.