

Council, Tuesday 17 April 2007

Opposition Policy Item to be moved by Councillor Moore

Promoting public engagement and participation in Barnet Area Forums.

Council welcomes the aims in the local government white paper “Strong & Prosperous Communities”, with regard to better public engagement in the democratic process.

Council also welcomes the fledgling project on Democratic Champions and it’s intention to respond to those aims.

Council believes, however, that increased public participation requires public confidence in consultation.

Council notes that about half of those residents responding to the 2006/7 Residents Attitude Survey felt the Council does not listen, does not involve residents and is not responsive.

Council also notes that one of the stated aims of the Council’s consultation strategy is “to ensure Barnet’s residents and civil society has the fullest possible opportunity to become involved.”

Council further notes that despite this stated aim the Special Committee (Constitution Review) has proposed amendments to the Constitution that will further curtail the public’s ability to participate by cutting the number of Area Forums by 50%.

Council believes that the erosion of opportunities for public engagement damages the reputation of the Council as a “listening” Council, and flies in the face of the Council’s stated motto that they are “putting the community first”.

Area Forums should function as the “front door” to the Councils’ democratic process, enabling and enhancing the relationship between the council and the community.

With the impending reduction of the existing forums, it is imperative that the Council ensures that the local community’s voice is still heard.

Council therefore requests Cabinet consider asking the Resources Performance and Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee to undertake a review of the attendance, working and outcomes of Area Forums with a view to increasing participation from the wider Barnet community.