IDeA CASSI report back summary
Part two community engagement

This summary is submitted to the scrutiny review as a short position statement for consideration. The IDeA lead is unable to attend the July meeting but hopes to attend a subsequent committee meeting at which he can respond to queries and questions arising from this paper.

Context

1. Developing an effective approach to community engagement is becoming more and more essential for all councils. There are a number of different phrases current in documentation, principle amongst these are neighbourhood empowerment, connecting with communities, community engagement, community empowerment and community involvement. For the purpose of this feedback we use community engagement as a catch all to refer to any attempt to consult on local needs and/or involve residents in reviewing and developing services or policy.

2. Local authorities have acquired new responsibilities in relation to community engagement in recent years specifically to promote democratic understanding, a formal response protocol for local petitions, and extension of the duty to involve partners in strategic development and delivery of the Local Area Agreement (LAA). A duty to inform, consult and involve was enacted in April 2009.

3. The new performance framework for councils, Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), places considerable importance upon knowledge of local needs and local perceptions of services. There are seven indicators within the national indicator set that forms the basis for the LAA that relate to community empowerment.

4. There is an aligned impetus from central government and from the LGA to develop a more customer focussed approach to council services. This is not possible without effective community engagement to identify local need and the type of provision that residents want and consider to be effective.

5. The LGA has been keen to increase community engagement and to improve local perception of service quality. The LGA Reputation project has provided baseline information on engagement and highlighted areas for development and challenge for all councils. LGA/IDeA have recently received funding from CLG to initiate a network of empowering councils with two identified lead councils in each region, a benchmark of an ideal empowering council and a self evaluation toolkit.

6. IDeA also has a customer insight project which provides guidance on how to better understand community need and the active application of this in the design of services. A downloadable guide to customer insight is available via the IDeA website.

7. Local Government Employers are about to commence a major project, together with CLG, on empowering the frontline workforce, which will include employee engagement. Effective employee engagement is seen as key to delivery of effective services. Our previous summary of findings (on consultation) included issues to consider in relation to employee engagement/consultation.

8. IPSOS/MORI and the LGA have produced a review of 'The key drivers of resident satisfaction with councils'. There is a report by the Community Development Foundation on 'The duty to involve: making it work'. Both these reports contain practical advice and guidance for authorities. The IDeA knowledge website has many case studies and findings that relate to community engagement and customer insight and these are regularly updated as is information on the network of empowering authorities.

Issues to consider

9. <u>A one size fits all approach will not deliver effective engagement.</u> There is no one picture of community needs and views. Councils need to understand the needs of specific priority target groups/neighbourhoods as well as the general picture in each of its local communities. Some needs and user groups will not fit into a picture based on physical communities, such as the needs of vulnerable adults, and will require a specific approach to their engagement.

10. <u>It is essential that all engagement activity is centrally coordinated</u> within a dedicated council team, even though delivery may be delegated to individual services to implement. There is a need to develop an overarching strategic approach to engagement so that initiatives are coordinated across the council and its partners. Such an approach needs to be developed at the most senior level of the council. Much of the existing work on engagement will traditionally have been located within specific council services. Strategic coordination will require that specialist communications officers play an integral role in policy development and strategic decision making and have an advisory role with services in relation to service specific engagement activity.

11. It would be useful to <u>map and audit existing engagement and involvement</u> activity. The information can then be used to better plan engagement in a strategic fashion corporately rather than delegating this function entirely to individual services. This is neither cost effective nor an efficient use of officer and resident time.

12. There are a <u>variety of ways that councils can develop engagement</u>, from informing local people, consulting them, through to involving them in decisions on budgets and the delivery and design of services. The DH have produced a good toolkit to plan how to involve local people 'Real involvement: working with people to improve health services' which although obviously health related uses

the concept of different levels of engagement/involvement to map out an effective strategy. The IDeA self assessment tool and the benchmark could also be used as an aid to developing more effective engagement.

13. Manchester's 100 days campaign provides a good example of strategic engagement which has lead to 10,000 people becoming involved across all sectors of the local community. South Tyneside undertook a smaller but equally effective campaign 'Blitz it and do your bit' a number of years ago in relation to an area based street maintenance initiative. Staffordshire County Council used an innovative mix of methods of consultation and has 50 staff who have volunteered to be community first champions to raise awareness and share good practice across the council.

14. Engagement with different groups. There have been beacon awards for ''positive youth engagement', 'positive engagement with older people', 'transforming services, citizen engagement and empowerment' and 'getting closer to communities' details of which are on the IDeA beacon website.

15. A number of London authorities have developed interesting practice in relation to bme community engagement including Tower Hamlets, Haringey, and Crawley.

16. There are other examples of effective work with young people in Devon Young Commissioners, and Hampshire with its Futures group using multi media in schools.