

Community Representatives Event: Feedback

On Monday 6th July 2009 the council held a Community Representatives' Event as part of Take Part, Take Pride. The aim of the event was to say thank you to the representatives for the important and valued contributions they make, and to receive their feedback on their role and the local committees. We invited representatives to give presentations on what they see as the key concerns in their area, and the success and challenges of the community representatives' role. In the second half of the evening we had more detailed discussions with the representatives about the value of their roles and how they could be supported and enhanced in the future. Below is some of the feedback we received from the event.

1. What are the advantages of having community representatives?

- They have an important mandate from the council:
 - i. They provide a channel for local concerns to be passed on and heard e.g. the Sutton local committee used Community Representatives to successfully debate the issue of closing the park toilet blocks, and have devised an innovative solution involving a new café and toilet area on the site;
 - ii. they represent the views of a range of local community groups as they have access to a broad network of residents and forums; and
 - iii. They can pass back information and updates from the committees.
- By talking to many people in the local area, Community Representatives help to bring neighbours and communities together.
- The representatives act as a 'go between'; they can talk to residents who often have high emotions, and pass on these concerns and issues in a calm manner at the local committee meetings.
- Community Representatives understand what the key issues are in their localities. In her presentation, Angela Marriot (Worcester Park Residents Association) described the key concerns in Worcester Park which are congestion, housing developments and air pollution. This local knowledge can help to set the agenda and priorities of the local committee meetings.
- Representatives help to get policy issues looked at, and can provide much needed facts and figures in the local area.
- Representatives help to uphold and sponsor particular issues, for example the importance of tree conservation

- Community Representatives have often helped to increase the resources available for local activities, for example by accessing land fill tax credits, which in some cases has led to a reduction in graffiti and fly-tipping.

2. How do you think the role of the Community Representatives could be enhanced?

- Informal talks could help new representatives to prepare for their role
- Could meetings be brought forward so they don't finish so late?
- Could the venue be changed?
- Advanced notice of issues in the agenda would help the representatives to prepare and pass on information to local residents.
- Community Representatives could be involved more at the agenda planning stage, for example by inviting them to the meetings where relevant.
- When representatives cannot attend meetings they miss important information or updates and subsequently feel out of touch. We need to make sure feedback is passed back to them; when the sound recordings are published on the internet we should email the link out so the representatives know where to find them.
- When issues or questions are put forward in the meetings ensure the representatives receive appropriate and thorough feedback.
- More social events would help to broaden the focus of the representatives.
- We should share information about the names of other associations and the dates of their meetings on our website.
- A briefing pack could be produced to clarify the role and expectations of the community representatives, and to help them understand the processes occurring outside of the meetings
- Look at ways of supporting and developing the relationship between Community Representatives and the Local Committee Chairs.
- Could the Community Representatives as a matter of course sit around the decision-making table?

3. How do you think the Community Representatives could work together more outside of the formal Local Committee meetings?

What could the council do to support this?

- Representatives could meet in pre-local committee meetings and discuss items with members. These discussions could help to form agendas.
- More help could be given to developing better relationships between ward councillors and community representatives.

- A two-way online discussion forum or blog could help to share information and improve communications.
- The council could provide more help / support for Community Representatives setting up events / fun days.
- Sutton Housing Federation / Home Front deals with 6000 properties and would appreciate help with gaining feedback from residents, and help to set up a website.
- Chairs could visit organisations' Annual Group Meetings more to find out what's going on in that area and what the current issues are.
- Joint meetings could be held annually, for example friends of park groups or residents associations, or a meeting of the representatives of a particular local committee
- The council could help to facilitate meetings and provide contact lists of other organisations and Community Representatives across the borough
- Clarify what articles can and can't be included within Sutton Scene and ensure Community Representatives are clear about how they can promote their events and activities.
- We could help to facilitate the sharing of good practice between representatives, recognising that many representatives undertake similar activities at some point or another. For example in June 2009 the St Helier Festival was coordinated by local Community Representatives with the help of local groups. The event had a circus, live acts and food and was a huge success, attracting over 2000 people who gave very positive feedback. To help this the council could:
 - i. Put on a regular event where representatives can network and share activities / developments;
 - ii. Improve the lead officers' role to help share this information;
 - iii. Encourage Community Representatives to write a paragraph summarising their experience and publishing this in a central place for others to read;
 - iv. Provide more information on the web pages;
 - v. Encourage Community Representatives to provide short information bulletins which can be handed out at the start of local committee meetings or published online; and
 - vi. When emailing out local committee agendas include a collection / update of big issues occurring in the borough and individual local committee areas.