

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: Bellshill and District Area Committee	Subject: Decentralisation Scheme Review
From: Chief Executive	
Date: 1 December 1998	Ref: CE/012/023/004

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to request Bellshill and District Area Committee to consider those comments it would wish to bring to the attention of the Policy and Resources (Community Development) Sub Committee when reviewing the Council's Decentralisation Scheme.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 At its meeting on 29 October 1998 Bellshill and District Area Committee agreed to defer consideration of the current review of Decentralisation to allow an informal meeting of members to be arranged to discuss current issues. Accordingly, members met in the Civic Centre on 25 November 1998 and this report summarises the main issues raised and key points of discussion.

3.0 Key Issues**3.1 Terms of Reference**

Members agreed that the Area Committee was generally satisfying its remit and the Terms of Reference were adequate to reflect those items of business brought before the Committee.

3.2 Remit

There was some discussion regarding the principles of Decentralisation. Whilst members recognised that the Area Committee had only limited powers and delegated responsibilities at this stage in its development, the desire for greater delegation and devolved authority was coupled with the concern that Area Committees may become unnecessarily bureaucratic. This was argued with particular reference to consideration of Planning matters where it was highlighted that referring these to Area Committees may result in additional procedural and timescale requirements.

Members generally agreed that an Area Budget should be available at Area Committee level to enable members to allocate resources to those priorities identified at an Area level and individual to Bellshill and District. It was recognised that other Area Committees may experience contrasting local priorities and would allocate their local Area Budgets accordingly.

The potential for Area Committees to bring matters of local concern and importance to the attention of the Central Committees was recognised. Similarly, whilst it was recognised that Central Committees may remit items with a particular local focus to the relevant Area Committee, it was argued that this should happen automatically with all those items with a local relevance referred to the Area Committee for comment.

3.3 Support and Services

The levels of support and assistance provided to the Area Committee were considered satisfactory.

3.4 Area Team

Members agreed in principle with the establishment of an Area Team of officers where those officers had a particular local knowledge or area of responsibility. It was suggested however, that the Area Team should only be requested to meet where there was a particular item of business or task to be undertaken. There was some concern that the Area Team may be perceived as another layer of Decentralisation and it was also highlighted that the Area Team should not be permitted to pursue initiatives or issues through the Area Committee structure where these could be considered to be at a variance with Central or Departmental policies.

The potential contribution to be made by the Area Team to the production of a Bellshill and District Area Profile was considered particularly important and beneficial. The production of the Area Profile document itself was considered to be extremely worthwhile since this will provide members with a reference guide to services, resource deployment, current issues and opportunities within Bellshill and the surrounding areas.

3.5 Resources

Dedicated resources are not currently allocated by the Council to support the Area Committee and Community Forum structure and members noted that the costs associated with Decentralisation have been absorbed by Departments through mainline resources. The members further noted that the Chief Executive's Department has included a growth bid of £50,000 to support Decentralisation in the 1999/00 Service Planning process.

3.6 Community Involvement

Members expressed some concern at the low level of participation and attendance by community members in the Area Committee meetings, although it was recognised that meetings are not currently publicised due to lack of resources.

3.7 Achievements

The Area Committee has made a number of significant achievements over the past year and members cited the following as particularly worthwhile examples:-

- Community Forum has been established and meets on a six weekly cycle in line with Area Committee. Community Forum representatives participate fully in Area Committee meetings;
- Area Committee does not allow party political differences to interfere with, interrupt or influence Committee business;
- Area Committee has taken up, or contributed to, local issues on behalf of the wider Bellshill community, including: road safety issues in Orbiston; the consumption of alcohol in public places; and, the installation of CCTV cameras to Bellshill Main Street

3.8 Future Achievements

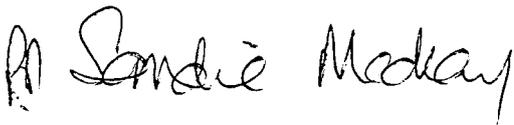
In concluding the discussion members considered future initiatives to be undertaken by Bellshill and District Area Committee over the forthcoming year. The possibility of submitting a regular press release to the local paper, "The Bellshill Speaker", detailing the activities of the Area Committee was proposed. It was suggested that Departments should be invited to report to the Area Committee describing current levels of service delivery and any potential issues in order to raise

awareness and understanding amongst both members and Community Forum participants. It was further proposed that the Area Committee should have information on the range of Council funding sources available to community and voluntary organisations and where possible, organisations should be assisted to secure funding from external sources. The recent partnership with Bellshill and Mossend YMCA to develop a funding information and advice service was recognised as contributing towards the achievement of this aim.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 Bellshill and District Area Committee is requested to:

- i) consider, amend where appropriate, and approve the comments discussed by members in response to the Council's review of Decentralisation and documented in Sections 3.1 to 3.8 above;
- ii) advise the Chief Executive of any further comments the Area Committee would wish to make with regard to Decentralisation;
- iii) agree to remit both this report and any further comments approved by the Area Committee to the Policy and Resources (Community Development) Sub Committee for consideration when reviewing the Council's Scheme of Decentralisation; and
- iv) otherwise note the contents of this report.



Chief Executive