



work that has already been done;

- To issue a basic guide to LAAs, what they are, how they work, their principal purpose and objectives, as well as a glossary;
- It is important to emphasise that O&S is there as a “critical friend” and can help LAA partners with their work. Co-operation will be beneficial to all parties.

The legislation requires partners to respond to requests for information relating to LAA targets within 20 days. It is important to build relationships to that LAA partners are willing to attend meetings with O&S committees rather than simply send a written response. This will have benefits to both the partners and the O&S committees, such as clarifying any issues, focusing on particular issues and developing understanding.

C. Community Scrutiny

Petitions

There was a general preference for less prescription as to what defines a statutory “petition” rather than more. There are difficulties with any kind of restriction, and a wiser approach would give individual councils powers to make definitions appropriate to their specific circumstances. Most councils would continue to accept petitions that showed local concern, even if they did not meet the conditions for statutory petitions.

The issues were not the same as for petitions that might trigger a referendum, where the minimum number was designed to avoid referenda on frivolous or minority issues. Here the purpose is rather to demonstrate that there is local concern about an issue, and precise numbers are less important since less is at stake (e.g. not the costs in time and effort of running a referendum).

It was reasonable that the lead petitioner had a

link with the area, normally as a resident. Also that those who signed petitions gave sufficient information for them to be identified, e.g. name and address.

Children should be encouraged to sign petitions on appropriate topics.

Petitions should be presented to the most appropriate places – the Executive, Area Committees, Regulatory Committees, sometimes to Audit Committees or Scrutiny Committees, but it should be recognised that this last would not necessarily lead to swift action, since these may not meet frequently, and they cannot take decisions – in contrast Executives, area committees, or individual councillors who hold budgets can take decisions and commit resources.

Where time and effort has been put into preparing a petition and collecting signatures, the lead petitioner should be invited to speak to the petition, before the relevant body takes a decision as to what to do with it. Councils should prepare protocols for this – e.g. about how many people should speak, for how long. (There are good precedents with Development Control Committees), but in the last resort it is the quality of chairing, and then whether the petition makes a difference, that will determine whether petitioners are satisfied.

Calls for Action

In many councils, members already have powers to place items on the agendas of scrutiny committees. In these circumstances, the new powers will not add much, and could even reduce this (e.g. confining some matters to the councillor elected for a particular ward).

The processes of calls for action need to be integrated into existing processes – e.g. as standing items on the agendas of area committees or forums.

There is also need for guidance for partner organisations, and others who are involved in the