



**Review of First Year of Operation of
Ballymun Whitehall
Community Advisory Group**

Draft Final

December 2009

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1. Introduction

1.1 Review of the CAG

To optimise the contribution of the community, and the Community Directors, to the Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership, and to support good communication between the Partnership and the local community, a Community Advisory Group (CAG) was established for the Partnership area in the second half of 2008.

As this was a new structure, the CAG asked Hibernian Consulting in late-2008 to undertake a short evaluation of the work of the CAG during its first year of operation. The CAG's work in 2009 included developing its Terms of Reference, agreeing communications guidelines with the Partnership and nominating Community Directors to the Partnership Board.

Hibernian Consulting met on three occasions during 2009 with staff members from the Community Development section of the Partnership in relation to the CAG. In December 2009, they met the CEO of the Partnership (Declan Dunne) and the Chairman of the CAG and Manager of the Ballymun Job Centre (Mick Creedon) to discuss the work of the CAG. Other members of the CAG were contacted by telephone (insofar as possible) and interviews were undertaken with the following:

- Ann Hyland, Ballymun Men's Network
- Audrey Meehan, Community Action Project
- Paddy Haughey, The Plough Youth Club
- Dee Higgins, Depaul Trust
- Anne-Marie Hughes, Youth Action Project
- Amanda Murphy, Ballymun Women's Resource Centre
- Lynda Ward, CAFTA
- Frank Rock, Ballymun Men's Centre
- Laurence van der Haegen, BRYR Ballymun Regional Youth Resource
- Mary Fitzpatrick, Shangan Neighbourhood Forum
- Karen Shannon, Balcurris/Balbutcher Neighbourhood Forum
- Bernadette Carberry, Larkhill Residents Association
- Ian Croft, Santry Community Forum

To supplement these discussions, Hibernian Consulting received the minutes of CAG meetings from late-2008 to late-2009 and other CAG-related documentation.

1.2 A Time of Policy Change

This review was finalised during a period of change in relation to local and community development in Ireland. December 2009 saw the amalgamation of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) and the Community Development Programme (CDP), with the formation of a new Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP). The December 2009 national budget saw funding cut for Partnership Companies, on top of cuts already implemented earlier in 2009,

and in 2008. Reduced funding has also occurred on related programmes, e.g. Dormant Accounts and RAPID.

The LCDP, to be implemented from 2010, has four goals, with the first three broadly (but not precisely) reflecting the former LDSIP goals¹. The fourth goal is of particular interest to the CAG. It is ‘to promote active engagement with policy, practice and decision making processes on matters affecting local communities’ and this is to be achieved via two objectives:

1. Promotion of dialogue between funders, providers and local communities; and
2. Development and sustaining of opportunities for communities of place and interest to identify issues and voice concerns.

Background documentation in relation to the new LCDP, prepared in autumn 2009 by the Centre for Effective Services (CES) on behalf of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, identified outcomes and examples of indicators that would arise in relation to these objectives, and these are shown below.

Outcomes set out by CES in relation to Goal 4 of the LCDP

1. Effective structures and processes in place for dialogue between policy makers, providers and local communities;
2. Greater engagement in policy and decision making processes by the community;
3. Improved understanding of local community concerns and priorities by policy makers and service providers.

Examples of Possible Indicators from CES in relation to Goal 4 of the LCDP

1. Increase in mechanisms effectively promoting information sharing and dialogue
2. Increase in number and diversity of local people participating effectively in local committees and in other decision-making forums
3. Increase in perceptions of local groups and residents of greater engagement
4. Increase in number and range of local service providers participating in local community forums
5. Increase in understanding of local issues by policy makers and service providers
6. Increase in local people’s understanding of policy, practice and decision-making processes

Source: LCDP National Programme Logic Model (Centre for Effective Services)

The outcomes and indicators shown above demonstrate that the LCDP places a strong emphasis on involving the local community in the work of Partnerships and the programme, with an emphasis on diversity of engagement and *effective* engagement. This agenda links to, and reflects, the agenda of the CAG (and indeed the previous Departmental guidelines – see next section).

¹ See Press Release of 10th December 2010, available from the website of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

1.3 Structure of Report

Subsequent sections of this report are as follows:

- Section 2 presents information in relation to the origins of the Community Advisory Group in Ballymun-Whitehall, its establishment, and its work between late-2008 and late-2009;
- Section 3 presents views obtained from the consultation process in relation to the different aspects of the CAG and its work;
- Section 4 presents a number of conclusions from the research and some suggestions arising for the CAG and its work in 2010.

2. Background to, and Operation of, the CAG

2.1 Background to Community Advisory Group

The Community Advisory Group operating in the area of the Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership emerged following:

- 2007 guidelines from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs;
- Research and consultation over several years in relation to representation by local people in Ballymun on community and local development Boards.

Further details on these two sets of reasons for the establishment of the CAG are set out below.

2.1.1 Departmental Guidelines of 2007

The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs published a document in April 2007 entitled ‘Guidelines on the Governance of Integrated Local Development Companies and Urban Based Partnerships’.

Commenting on Partnership Boards, this document stated:

“Board members should be nominated through either an electoral process or a sectoral process so that their contribution is not as an individual, but has weight and support from nominating groups”.

Inclusion of the community and voluntary sector on the Board was explicitly mentioned with the document stating: “Boards should include all four sectors (Local Government, Local Authority, Social Partners including community and voluntary sector and the Statutory Sector) and a balance should be achieved between the sectors.”

The document states that an Area Partnership Company has two options in relation to the selection of Community Directors:

1. It can oversee its own nomination process, in which case approval is required from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (through the Director of Service for Community & Enterprise in the relevant County or City Development Board);
2. The Area Partnership can request the Director of Community & Enterprise in its CDB to oversee the nomination process. If the Department is not satisfied with any proposals under Option 1, then Option 2 automatically applies.

Whichever option is used, the Department sets out that selection of representatives from the community and voluntary sector for the Partnership Board should be guided by the following:

- “Community organisations should have a proven track record of community development work including social inclusion ... and be committed to the partnership process;
- “In line with the objectives of the LDSIP, it will be important to ensure that nominations are sought from networks with a social inclusion focus, e.g. women’s and men’s networks, youth networks, lone parent networks; persons with a disability networks; Traveller networks; older people’s networks; long-term unemployed people’s networks; new communities networks; and other networks”;
- “There should be an appropriate gender balance with a particular focus on the participation of disadvantaged women”.

The guidelines set out that membership of the Board of a Partnership should be for three years.

2.1.2 Community Action Network Research

Between 2005 and 2008, a number of pieces of research and consultation were undertaken in Ballymun on the topic of the representation of local people on community and local development boards.

An action research process undertaken by local women in 2005 led to the report: *Is Anybody Listening?* Commissioned by the Community Development sub-group of the Partnership, and supported by the Ballymun Anti-Poverty Network, this concluded that there was no agreed understanding of what was involved in representing a community on a Board, nor were there clear or agreed procedures for matters such as election/selection, length of tenure, or responsibility for feedback to the community that one represents.

The research further found that 83% of residents in Ballymun did not believe that they had a voice when it came to local matters².

In response to this research, Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership:

- Produced a guide for community representatives that proposed ways to establish more meaningful participation;
- Revised its procedures and Terms of Reference for community representatives on its Board;
- Invited the Community Action Network to undertake two follow-up consultation sessions in December 2007 on community participation. This led to feedback under four headings: understanding of community representation; accountability and reporting back to the community; experience of Board membership; and future supports for Board members.

² The ‘Is Anybody Listening?’ research publication is available from the ‘Downloads’ section of the Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership website – at www.ballymun.org

2.2 Establishment of the Community Advisory Group

2.2.1 Formation of the CAG

Informed by both the local research and the Department's guidelines, the Community Directors of the Partnership, in consultation with local community groups, relevant Partnership staff and the Partnership's Administration Committee, developed the idea of the CAG.

Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership decided in the second quarter of 2008 to adopt the proposal for a Community Advisory Group, which would constitute the mechanism by which Community Directors would be appointed to the Partnership Board, and would allow for enhanced two-way communication between the Partnership and the local community.

Before being implemented, this structure was shared, and agreed, with the Director of Community & Enterprise of Dublin City Development Board (CDB) and, through the CDB, with the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. This permitted the Partnership to operate its own process of nominating Community Directors.

Consistent with the Department's guidelines, it was decided that the CAG would operate through sectoral 'networks' or clusters of organisations in similar sectors of activity. In July and August 2008, the Community Development section of the Partnership sought membership of nine networks, including through newspaper advertisements, direct contact with local community and voluntary groups and public information sessions.

The networks, and the organisations that signed up for them, are listed below:

Number	Network	Organisations
1	Youth	Boys' Hostel; BRYR Ballymun Regional Youth Resource; Ballymun Girls' Residential Project; Setanta Hurling Club
2	Social Enterprise, Economic Development and Employment	Ballymun Job Centre; Ballymun Men's Network
3	Education and Training	Ballymun Adult Read & Write Scheme; Ballymun Communications; Ballymun Women's Resource Centre; BITE – Ballymun Initiative for Third Level Education; Community & Family Training Agency; DCU in the Community; Forum for Arts; Solas Development Centre
4	Drug and Alcohol Services	Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force; Depaul Trust; YAP and Urrus
5	Ballymun Community Organisations Network (B-CON)	Acorn Empowerment; Ballymun Intercultural Group; Ballymun Unemployed and Welfare Rights Centre; CAP; Drop In Well FRC; Global Action Plan (GAP); St. Margaret's Travellers Community Association; The Plough Youth Club
6	Childcare	15 childcare providers are members of this network – contact with further providers was being made in 2009 with providers in the extended Partnership area
7	Health and Wellbeing	Active Living; BADIG – Ballymun Active Disability Group; Ballymun Men's Centre Ltd.

8	Sports and Leisure	Ballymun United FC; St. Paul's Sports and Youth Club
9	Ballymun Neighbourhood Council and Residents Association.	Ballymun Neighbourhood Council
Source: Ballymun Whitehall Partnership website, autumn 2009		
Note: Membership of networks changes from time to time and listings may not be completely up to date		

Of the networks listed, three predated the CAG: B-CON, the Childcare Network and the Ballymun Neighbourhood Council and Residents Association. These continue to have an ongoing operation separate to CAG and this is a source of strength in that they have existing arrangements to meet and discuss issues of interest.

Having encouraged local groups to join (and nominate a representative to) one of the nine networks, each network was asked to nominate two representatives to the CAG by mid-October 2008. Elections were not required as each network was able to agree who its nominees would be.

A first meeting of the CAG was held in late-October 2008 with the primary purpose of nominating six community representatives to the Partnership Board. (In total, there are eight Community Director places on the Partnership Board but two places were held back for representatives of the areas in Whitehall, Glasnevin and Santry to which the Partnership was to extend its coverage from 2009.) At the meeting, those interested in being elected to the Board were asked to introduce themselves and state why they should be elected, and a secret ballot then led to the election of six representatives to the Partnership Board.

The new Community Directors took up their places on the Board of the Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership from start-2009.

2.2.2 Establishing Processes and Terms of Reference for the CAG

A facilitated workshop was held for CAG members in November 2008 to identify opportunities and challenges facing the CAG. Points arising from this meeting included the following:

- Establishment of the CAG represented an exciting opportunity for the community as it allowed for better links between the Partnership and the work of organisations 'on the ground'.
- The CAG could help the Partnership to better look at the community on a holistic rather than a sectoral basis.
- The CAG should be democratic and should support the members chosen to sit on the Partnership Board.
- It may be hard to keep people involved with the CAG over time. Some organisations or people may not see the benefits or may be apathetic. Partly for this reason, results will be required, and outcomes are important.
- A misunderstanding about what the CAG can realistically achieve might limit its effectiveness. It is important that expectations are not too high.

A second workshop was held for CAG members in January 2009 which built on the work of the November workshop. Points arising from this meeting included the following:

- The important role of the Partnership's Administration Committee was noted: this sets the agenda for Partnership Board meetings.
- It was agreed that CAG meetings would be held two weeks in advance of each Partnership Board meeting.
- The role of CAG members in representing wider community views was emphasised.
- It was noted that "a condition of membership of the CAG is that meetings are attended as far as possible" and "where a member misses three consecutive meetings, the Chair will approach the individual to establish the cause of the absence".
- It was agreed that the CAG should seek to include members from the new Partnership areas.

The meeting led to the drafting of a Terms of Reference for the CAG, which was presented to the February 2009 CAG meeting for comment. Also in February 2009, members of the CAG were invited to attend a half-day information seminar on corporate governance organised by the Ballymun Community Law Centre.

Around this time, a dedicated section of the Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership website was developed for the CAG. This contains the (finalised) Terms of Reference of the CAG and lists its members, and the organisations that are members of the nine networks. The website states: "The Community Advisory Group has been established to provide a transparent, open and democratic process for the selection of community representatives to the Board of Ballymun Partnership and to advise the organisation on community issues. The proposal for this new structure was developed by the Community Development Working Group of the Partnership and is in keeping with guidelines from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. It is hoped that the Community Advisory Group will provide a model of good practice for selecting and supporting community representatives and to advise Ballymun Partnership on community issues." This section of the website is updated by the Partnership with CAG-related news or documentation.

2.3 Operation of the CAG

Over the first 15 months of its existence, the CAG met on the following dates:

- 16th October 2008 (to nominate representatives to Partnership Board);
- 24th November 2008 (workshop);
- 19th January 2009 (workshop);
- 4th February 2009;
- 4th March 2009;
- 1st April 2009;
- 3rd June 2009;
- 8th July 2009;

- 2nd September 2009;
- 7th October 2009;
- 4th November 2009;
- XX December 2009.

No meetings were held in May or August 2009 as there was no Partnership Board meeting in those months.

Key items addressed by the February and March meetings were agreement of the Terms of Reference for the group and nomination of representatives to the Partnership's Administration Committee.

After the March meeting of the Partnership Board, the Partnership CEO prepared a report for the CAG, providing a response to a query on the role of the Administration Committee and feedback on other matters arising at the Board meeting. Since that time, this process has evolved and the Partnership CEO now prepares a note for the CAG following each Partnership Board meeting. This is an edited version of the minutes of the Board meeting, with confidential matters excluded. (It also acts as a record for other – non-community – Board members who wish to circulate some record of Board meetings.)

In spring 2009, having established its focus, the CAG began a process of identifying issues it wanted raised at the Partnership Board. For example, in June 2009, issues relating to the implications of budget cuts and the delay in getting an appointment with the local Money Advice and Budgeting Service were identified for the next Board meeting. Responses were reported back to the July CAG meeting.

To help to ensure that the CAG receives responses to its queries, and to support ongoing communication, it was decided to develop guidelines in relation to communication between the CAG, the Partnership Board and the Administration Committee. These were agreed in October 2009 and confirm that communication between the CAG and the Partnership Board is a two-way process, with both bodies making suggestions and recommendations to, and asking questions of, each other. There will be a specific line of communication between the CAG Chair and the Partnership CEO and the important role of the Partnership's Administration Committee was noted.

The CAG vacancies for representatives of organisations in the new Partnership areas (i.e. the areas into which the Partnership extended its work in 2009) were filled in July 2009. The CAG (through the Partnership) undertook a publicity campaign and representatives were appointed from the Santry Guild ICA/Local History Group, the Larkhill Residents Association and the Santry Community Forum. Despite the publicity campaign, there were only three nominations for the four available positions.

As there were two vacancies on the Partnership Board for representatives of the communities in the areas, the three CAG members from the new areas were asked in September 2009 if they would like to sit on the Board. One of these members was nominated to the Board in September 2009 and it was hoped to nominate a further person in early-2010.

3. Views on the Community Advisory Group

3.1 Establishment of the CAG and Operation of Networks

The establishment of the Community Advisory Group in the third quarter of 2008 was undertaken under time pressure and those involved agreed that more time would have allowed for more information on the CAG to be circulated and would have facilitated more time for the election of CAG representatives to the Partnership Board. It was accepted that electing Community Directors so early meant that they were not well known to all CAG members. However, people consulted placed this in context and emphasised that the CAG has been a good development for local communities and groups as regards their relationship with the Partnership.

In relation to the nine CAG networks, those consulted felt that the number of local organisations that had affiliated to one or other of the networks was reasonably good. Over 30 organisations were linked to the networks, excluding the 30 or so organisations in B-CON and the 15+ organisations in the childcare network.

While two informants questioned whether the networks were useful, most thought that they were. In some cases, they already existed and in these cases there is an existing mechanism by which issues can be raised for the CAG. In other cases (e.g. Health & Wellbeing), the CAG has been a trigger for the groups in the network to come together. While this has not happened in all networks, one informant noted that this *could* arise if an issue arose for a sector, and the CAG has put a mechanism in place for such cooperation. It was also noted that the networks are consistent with the thrust of Goal 4 of the new LCDP.

Some organisations would like their network to meet more often (e.g. noted by organisations in the Youth and Education & Training networks). It was also accepted that there was scope to increase further the number of organisations linked to the networks.

Organisations in the Sports and Leisure network had a poor attendance at the CAG over its first year. These organisations do not necessarily have a social inclusion focus and volunteers may have full-time jobs, making it difficult to attend CAG meetings. It was felt that organisations in this network may be able to fit with either the Health and Wellbeing Network or the Youth Network and that it may be possible to discontinue this network.

It was felt that a number of other 'target groups' could benefit from a network. At present, the only network for a specific target group is that relating to youth (and indeed there is potential for this network to become more active and to develop over time). More target group focused networks could have implications for the 'thematic' groups if organisations are in a target group network but also want to feed into a thematic group (e.g. on health and wellbeing). However, the creation of networks relating to older people (a large target group in the new Partnership areas), the Traveller community (which has a CDP now moving towards a closer relationship with the Partnership) and members of new communities in Ballymun was suggested to give these specific groups a direct voice on the CAG.

The Terms of Reference for the CAG as agreed in January 2009 were seen to be useful and a good basis for the work of the CAG.

3.2 Operation of the CAG

3.2.1 Practical Developments in CAG Roll-Out

After its initial set-up phase, the CAG has generally met on a monthly basis and these meetings are seen as efficient, well structured and well chaired.

About 8-10 of the 18 network representatives (two reps each from the nine networks) attend most meetings. Attendance from some networks has been disappointing and a number of people said that the aim should be to have at least one person from each network attending each CAG meeting. (This is perhaps even more the case in light of the new LCDP guidelines.)

In terms of its processes in relation to the Partnership Board, the CAG discusses issues as raised by its members. If an issue is potentially for discussion by the Partnership Board, this is forwarded to the Partnership's Administration Committee (which includes a number of the Partnership's Community Directors) which may be able to address the issue or, if not, will decide if it is appropriate that it is placed on the Partnership Board agenda.

The Guidelines for Communications between the CAG and the Partnership, agreed in autumn 2009, address a range of issues relating to communications. These were welcomed by CAG members, who hoped that they would be implemented and would lead to a good system of communication between the CAG and the Partnership.

One Director noted that it is hard for volunteers to attend meetings scheduled during the day and that there tends to be more volunteers in the new Partnership areas. (However, such meetings are more convenient for the vast majority of CAG members.)

3.2.2 Perceived Benefits and Issues relating to CAG Operation

All of the CAG members consulted felt that the CAG served a useful purpose and was a good development for the community, and for Community Directors, in relation to interaction with the Partnership. The fact that the CAG was still at an early point of its development was noted by several members.

In commenting on their membership of the CAG, several members cited benefits in relation to networking and sharing information – “It is a good place to meet people working in the community”, one person said, “and not just the usual suspects”. This is of particular importance for representatives from the areas into which the Partnership extended in 2009.

A further benefit seen as arising from the CAG is the need for coordination in light of cutbacks to government spending in 2009 and 2010 and the changing local development 'landscape'. As the Partnership has an important role in supporting the local community/communities through during the economic downturn, it is seen as important that there is good communication from, and with, the community in the coming years. The CAG can also help to ensure that available resources are used to the best possible effect.

A concern raised was that CAG could overlap with, or duplicate, the work of other entities, e.g. BCON or the Partnership's Community Development sub-group. The need for the CAG to keep its focus was mentioned by several members.

A second concern related to a fear that CAG would become a 'talking shop', or 'part of the bureaucracy' around the Partnership without actually having an impact. It needed to avoid having the same discussions as happen at other forums, one member said. A focus needs to remain on outputs or achievements by the group, another member said.

A third concern was that it can take too much time for an issue to be raised at the CAG, go through the Administration Committee of the Partnership, go to the Partnership Board and then have the feedback to the CAG. "Can this process be speeded up in any way?" the person asked.

One member said that the CAG could do more to promote itself, e.g. via forums like BCON and others.

Questions asked about the CAG role were:

- Could the CAG could have a small budget, e.g. to do small pieces of research? While this may be hard in the current funding environment, it might give the CAG more status as an entity.
- Could the CAG have some input into the process whereby the Partnership sets its budget priorities for the following year? (It was appreciated that this process is already complex.)
- Could the CAG have some kind of formal link to Partnership sub-groups?

3.3 Work of Community Directors on Partnership Board

The community representatives elected to the Partnership Board by the CAG began attending Board meetings in January 2009. As such, they had been Board members for 10/11 months by December 2009.

The general view, both of the Board members themselves and of others, is that they have settled in well to the Board and begun to make a useful contribution on behalf of local communities. The Community Directors feel that they are taken seriously on the Partnership Board, their views are listened to and respected, and they have an equal voice to other Directors. One Director noted that this should not be taken for granted and Community Directors had an ongoing role to ensure that this was the case.

One Community Director said that the new Board members from the community sector could perhaps receive more support from the CAG as there is a lot of 'jargon', structures etc. associated with the Partnership and its activities. One new Director referred to the large number of acronyms etc. It may be that a role for the CAG would be a comprehensive (e.g. half-day) introduction to all aspects of the work of the Partnership, with a particular focus on new Community Directors.

The preparation by the Partnership CEO of a note on the proceedings of the Board was seen as useful by CAG members. It was appreciated that some elements of the Board's discussions would be confidential but it was hoped that, in general, the vast majority of Board proceedings could be made available, as this will assist the CAG in its work. It was stated that these notes are needed soon after the Board meeting so they can inform the next CAG meeting (which must take place in advance of the Administration Committee meeting, which itself takes place in advance of the following Board meeting).

As mentioned, there was a positive reaction to the communication guidelines agreed in autumn 2009 and it was hoped that these would underpin good communication between the Partnership Board, the Administration Committee and the CAG.

One informant noted that the contribution of new Board members to date tended to be mainly to ask questions on their area of interest. This was useful, but the person said that it would also be useful if the Board members could go further than this and propose more ideas and solutions as they develop greater experience on the Board.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

4.1 Conclusions

The research for this relatively brief evaluation suggests that the Community Advisory Group in the Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership area is a positive development for the Partnership, for community groups in the area and for local communities.

Based on feedback from the research, the success of the CAG derives mainly from putting in place a much improved structure to enable communication between the local communities in Ballymun, Whitehall, Santry and Glasnevin and the Partnership Board. Given the strategic role of the Partnership in many areas of community life, good communication with local communities is very important.

The focus of the CAG from late-2008 to late-2008 has been primarily in getting established, in agreeing Terms of Reference and communication guidelines and in electing Community Directors to the Partnership Board. With these tasks completed, the CAG will be able to focus more in 2010 on issues concerning the local community (as was partly its focus in 2009 also). The backdrop to the work in 2010 will be the consolidation of organisations in the local and community development sectors and a lower level of public funding than has been the case in recent years. It will also see higher levels of unemployment and poverty facing local communities.

The system of local networks gives the CAG clear roots in local communities and is, in itself, a tool to promote local participation. While entailing a certain amount of administrative work, the advantages of using local networks outweigh the disadvantages and their use should be continued, subject to some amendment (see suggestions below).

Attendance at CAG meetings over its first year has been satisfactory, and this is in itself an achievement. However, there is potential to increase attendance further at meetings, with the aim of having each network represented at each meeting.

There has been a poor level of interaction to date between the CAG and the Ballymun Neighbourhood Council and the Neighbourhood Forums. There has also been a poor level of involvement by organisations from the Sports & Leisure network. Attendance at the CAG is important as its usefulness and legitimacy derive in part from the attendance of representatives of the different networks. Attendance at the CAG of those members who sit on the Partnership Board is of particular importance.

The networks and the fact that Community Directors are elected by CAG members means that Partnership Community Directors are more likely to live locally and be involved on a personal basis in local issues. This ensures that this perspective is represented at Partnership Board level, in keeping with the Department's guidelines and the guidelines for the LCDP. It also helps to give the Community Directors a greater sense of collegiality and helps ensure that Partnership Board agendas reflect issues of local concern.

By late-2009, the processes of the CAG were working well, with regular, well-run meetings and communication channels between the CAG and the Partnership. There were also indications that the Partnership Board was beginning to see the CAG as a useful tool for community consultation.

The presence of eight Community Directors on the Partnership Board implies a good presence in this regard. There is also agreement that the Community Directors are taken seriously on the Board and that their input valued. There is some belief that the contribution of Community Directors can increase further in the future, with more contribution around proposals and potential solutions to local challenges.

The presence of some Community Directors on the CAG, the Partnership Board and the Administration Committee of the Partnership aids transparency and assists with the practical implementation of business.

The communication guidelines developed in September 2009 were seen as an important step in the development of the CAG and CAG members were optimistic that they would ensure good ongoing communications between the CAG and the Partnership.

Overall, therefore, in a difficult financial year (2009) for local and community development organisations, the work the CAG has been a positive development. Indeed, given the even tougher challenges facing local communities in 2010, it may be that the establishment of the CAG was very timely.

4.2 Suggestions Arising for the CAG

Based on this review, the following suggestions are made in relation to the work of the CAG in 2010 and thereafter.

Focus of Community Advisory Group

1. The guidelines for the new Local and Community Development Programme suggest that the CAG will have an even greater strategic importance for the Partnership from 2010 onwards. The CAG therefore needs to be seen as an important body by all stakeholders. The CAG should discuss the new LCDP guidelines, including the background CES material, at a meeting in early-2010.
2. Greater the increased importance of community involvement in the new LCDP, greater contact between the CAG and the Community Forum of the City Development Board would be of strategic benefit to the CAG.
3. To ensure that the Community Advisory Group does not duplicate the work of other local networks or organisations, the CAG needs to remain focused on its Terms of Reference and in particular its role in facilitating communication and the exchange of ideas between the Board of the Partnership and the local community/communities.
4. The CAG should discuss to what extent, if any, it has a role outside of the Partnership. For example, could the CAG or one of the local networks prepare a position paper on its own account and submit this to an external body? Clarity is

needed on this issue as the consultation suggested that different CAG members have different opinions on this.

5. The distinction between the Partnership's Community Development Sub-group (which guides the day-to-day work of the Partnership's community development staff) and the CAG should be noted and understood by CAG members.

Networks Feeding into the Community Advisory Group

6. The local networks should be maintained and even strengthened in light of the new LCDP guidelines. Facilitating local voices in contributing to the Partnership is more important than ever in the context of the new LCDP and all areas of the country will be looking for innovative approaches in this regard in the coming years. The CAG may even offer a model of good practice in this regard.
7. As attendance by its members at the CAG to date has been poor, the Sports and Leisure network should be discontinued. Member organisations should be invited to participate in one of the other CAG networks.
8. New networks should be established in relation to three target groups: older people; members of the Traveller community; and members of new communities living in the Partnership area. Where possible, these should draw on any existing groupings or networks that exist.
9. Support should be provided to any networks that wish to increase their level of activity. This includes the Youth Network, which has the potential over time to develop into a local Youth Forum.
10. As it is almost 18 months since the networks were formed, there should be a further effort to see if more local organisations can be persuaded to join one of the networks – the more organisations that are involved, the greater their inclusivity. This should be true for both the 'old' and 'new' Partnership areas.
11. The CAG should discuss how it can increase its level of interaction with the Ballymun Neighbourhood Council and Residents Association, and the Neighbourhood Forums.

Operation of the Community Action Group

12. Consideration should be given as to whether the CAG should change its Chairperson from time to time so as to encourage greater involvement by different organisations.
13. Building on the agreed communications guidelines, whenever either the CAG or the Partnership Board poses a question to the other body, a written response should be provided.
14. The CAG should explore with the Partnership if it could or should have any further input in relation to the Partnership's annual budgetary process.
15. The section of the Partnership website relating to the CAG should be kept up to date with minutes of meetings and other news posted promptly. This will support the functioning of the networks, demonstrate transparency and enhance consistency with LCDP guidelines.
16. The CAG should do a short annual evaluation of its work, including consultation with members, to ensure it continues to maximise its performance and outputs. This should include a review of the operation of the different networks.

Interaction of the CAG with the Partnership Board

17. Unless there is a good reason for this not to be the case, people should be members of the CAG for a six month period before they are elected to the Partnership Board – this will build knowledge of the CAG processes and enable CAG members to get to know the person in advance of their Board nomination.
18. The Community Development staff of the Partnership should provide a detailed briefing on all aspects of the work of the Partnership to newly nominated Community Directors (and other interested CAG members).
19. The CAG and the Community Directors should see their role not just as posing questions or raising issues for the Partnership Board, but also as putting forward ideas and potential solutions in relation to local issues. In a sense, there is no limit to the potential of the CAG role and voice in this regard in its contribution to the work of the Partnership.