

REPORT FOR DECISION



DECISION OF:	CABINET - 10 JUNE 2015 COUNCIL - 1 JULY 2015
SUBJECT:	TOWNSHIP FORUMS
REPORT FROM:	CABINET MEMBER – COMMUNITIES
CONTACT OFFICER:	Cindy Lowthian - Communities Manager
TYPE OF DECISION:	COUNCIL
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION/STATUS:	This paper is within the public domain
SUMMARY:	This report seeks approval to a number of recommendations to enhance Township Forums. Significant budgetary challenges facing the Council and partners, combined with a changing local partnership landscape and advances in digital technologies provide opportunities to refresh the Forums to make them more efficient, locally focused and effective.
OPTIONS & RECOMMENDED OPTION	<p>Option 1 (recommended)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Support the proposals outlined in the report.Recommend to the July meeting of Council that the Operating Framework for Township Forums is amended to incorporate these proposals.Recommend to the July meeting of Council that these proposals are implemented during the 2015/16 municipal year. <p>Option 2 (not recommended)</p> <p>Reject the proposals.</p> <p>Recommendation</p> <p>Option 1 is the recommended option as this would enhance the effectiveness of Township Forums. The proposals will help to reduce duplication across partners in relation to community engagement and strengthen local focus and accountability.</p>
IMPLICATIONS:	
Corporate Aims/Policy	Do the proposals accord with the Policy

Framework:	Framework? Yes	
Statement by the S151 Officer: Financial Implications and Risk Considerations:	All proposed changes are to be implemented within the existing budget provision for Township Forum activity.	SK
Health and Safety Implications	There are no known health and safety implications arising from this report	
Statement by Executive Director of Resources (including Health and Safety Implications)	Any Community Right to Bid applications will be dealt with in line with the Council's agreed procedures. There are no wider resource implications.	SK
Equality/Diversity implications:	Yes (see paragraph below).	
Considered by Monitoring Officer:	Yes The Operating Framework for Township Forums is part of the Council's Constitution. It is therefore recommended that Council amend the Constitution to reflect the proposed changes.	JH
Wards Affected:	All	
Scrutiny Interest:	Overview and Scrutiny	

TRACKING/PROCESS

DIRECTOR: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COMMUNITIES AND WELL BEING

Chief Executive/ Strategic Leadership Team	Cabinet Member/Chair	Ward Members	Partners
26/5/15	22/5/15		
Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet/Committee	Council	
	10/6/15		

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Township Forum Annual progress report presented to Council on 20 May highlighted the achievements of Township Forums over the past year. Township Forums have helped to co-ordinate a number of local projects and initiatives through Township Plans. They have also helped to attract external funding through the Bury East Alcohol Prospectus Scheme and the Radcliffe Our Place project. Whilst overall attendance has decreased slightly throughout the year by 8.66% (compared to the previous year), it still represents an increase of 17.31% compared to 2012/13. The value of the Forums is also recognised in facilitating public consultation exercises.
- 1.2 The report also highlighted a number of opportunities and challenges for the Forums over the coming year. Significant budgetary challenges facing the

Council and partners, combined with a changing local partnership landscape and advances in digital technologies provide opportunities to refresh the Forums and build more efficient, integrated locality working approaches.

2.0 CONSULTATION

- 2.1 To inform the recommendations, views were sought at the last round of Township Forum meetings on the following proposals:
- a) Reduce the number of generic presentations to help make meetings more locally relevant and purposeful.
 - b) Formalise police involvement in the Township Forums.
 - c) Reduce the frequency of meetings, at the same time promoting alternative community engagement mechanisms.
 - d) Strengthen the role of Township Forums in relation to provisions within the Localism Act, particularly the Community Right to Bid (Assets of Community Value).
 - e) Funding – delegate decisions relating to a combined small grants/ community funding pot to Township Forums.

- 2.2 In total 72 individual responses were received via the Township Forums. Appendix A provides a summary of these. The majority of responses indicate widespread consensus and support for the proposals with one exception; proposals to reduce the frequency of meetings generated a more mixed response, particularly from Whitefield and Unsworth, Prestwich and Radcliffe Township Forums.

3.0 PROPOSALS

(a) Reduce the number of generic presentations

- 3.1 Township Forums have helped facilitate a number of community consultation exercises with local councillors, community representatives and members of the public. However, too many presentations, particularly if they are not directly related to the local area lead to consultation fatigue, with the Township Forums in danger of losing their local focus and ability to address local priorities.
- 3.2 To address this, it is proposed that each Township forum provides a 'market place' prior to each meeting. Council Officers and partner representatives will be given the opportunity to attend, erect stands and stalls and provide details of any ongoing consultations and community information. This should reduce the need for generic presentations whilst at the same time still providing members of the public opportunities to ask questions and share their views. The majority of consultation responses received via the Township Forums are in favour of this proposal (72%).
- 3.3 Where presentations are made, these must address specific concerns to the township or be tailored to meet the particular needs of that area. The intention is not to stop communication or debate – but to improve the focus which is often missing in generic presentations. The Township Forum presentation protocol will be refreshed to reinforce this requirement to those presenting at future meetings.

(b) Formalise Police involvement in the Forums

- 3.4 Throughout the year, police attendance at Township Forums has been mixed. Township Co-ordinators state that where Police do attend, this has been positively received by both Township Forum members and the public who value the opportunity to raise and discuss local community safety concerns. The majority of consultation responses received via the Forums are in favour of this proposal (81%).
- 3.5 The Operating Framework for Township Forums states that Township Forum Advisory Group members “*can be made up of representatives from voluntary and community groups and partner organisations with an interest in the area*”. Discussions held so far with Greater Manchester Police (GMP) indicate willingness for the Police to formalise their membership on Township Forums. Over the coming months, Township Co-ordinators will work with their local police representatives to agree representation on the Township Forums.
- 3.6 Further opportunities to streamline engagement approaches with other partners will also be explored, particularly health colleagues.

(c) Reduce the frequency of meetings & harness wider engagement mechanisms

- 3.7 Township Forums provide an important tool to communicate with and engage local people. However, they are not the only instrument available. There are a wide range of other methods which can be used to share information, engage and empower people. These include tenant and resident groups, Youth Cabinet, Older People Forum, Customer Task Force, Patient Cabinet, Health Watch and councillor surgeries.
- 3.8 Significant advances in digital technology and social media also mean that increasing numbers of people prefer to share their views online rather than attend formal meetings e.g. through Facebook or Twitter. During the next year, we will explore opportunities to harness this technology to test approaches to online meetings in relation to key topic areas.
- 3.9 Other changes such as the refresh of the Council’s website to make it easier to contact and access services – and the Bury Directory providing a wide range of information on local services, groups and assets – are strengthening on-line communication. With the technology making access available 24/7 at times that matter to local people, more people are being nudged towards electronic rather than personal interaction.
- 3.10 In this context, it is proposed that a recommendation is made to Council to amend the Operating Framework for Township Forums which reduces the frequency of meetings from six to four per year from 2015/16 onwards. Although the consultation response from the Forums to this proposal was mixed, attendance figures show that relatively small proportions of the overall public attend the meetings on a regular basis, the business has become routine and there are a wide range of other methods for people to express their views.
- 3.11 Having fewer meetings combined with the other changes recommended in this report should help ensure the Forum meetings are more productive and locally focussed. Other (community led) meetings and events can still be organised by community representatives and/or residents as required. The intention is for the council organised Township Forum meetings to add value to the range of

other community engagement methods and tools available, thereby avoiding duplication and engagement fatigue.

(d) Localism Act 2011

- 3.12 The Localism Act requires local authorities to maintain a list of assets of community value which have been nominated by local community groups. It is designed to give communities more opportunity to take control of land or buildings important to them by giving them time to purchase the asset should it ever be listed.
- 3.13 Since the introduction of the Act, there have been five successful nominations listed by the Council. The current procedure involves seeking the views of local councillors prior to the determination of a nomination. It is proposed that future nominations will be shared through Township Forum members to seek their views prior to the determination of a nomination by the relevant Cabinet member. Most of the consultation responses received via Township Forums are supportive of this proposal.

(e) Community Funds

- 3.14 The Council already has a process for awarding small grants to organisations and it is proposed to delegate these community funding decisions to Township Forums to better align funding to township plan priorities. The intention is to strengthen local transparency and accountability in relation to the allocation of these grants and to develop a new process that increases community involvement in the decisions. The majority of consultation responses received through township forums supported this proposal.
- 3.15 The Council proposes to allocate £8,000 to each Township Forum, supporting the work of voluntary and community groups with applications being determined during the June, September, November and March cycle of meetings. The applications will be considered by a sub group meeting prior to the forum with the decisions being announced during the Township Forum. A maximum of £250 individual grant is available for formally constituted organisations.
- 3.16 Additionally, a borough-wide allocation of £8,000 will be available for "cross-township" applications for activity that takes place across township boundaries. The applications will again be open to constituted community and voluntary organisations in the third sector, with a maximum grant of £500 per application. These applications would be determined by the Council's Small Grants Panel. Funding decisions for both these schemes would be reported to the relevant Township Forum(s) with a follow-up evaluation after 3-6 months.

4.0 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 Consultation has taken place with each of the Township Forums. The results of this exercise (attached) indicate significant levels of support for most of the proposals. The issue which divides the Forums is the frequency of meetings.
- 4.2 It is accepted that decision making in relation to small grants through Township Forums could be slower if the frequency of meetings is reduced. In mitigation, a small contingency pot has been retained centrally to be allocated (through the Small Grants Panel) where more urgent decision making is required.

- 4.3 There is also a counter-risk from not taking action. Attendance levels (as a proportion of resident population) continue to be low. These proposals seek to increase community engagement by giving the Forums new powers, reducing the number of generic presentations and increasing attendance by the Police at meetings.

5.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 5.1 The Equality Analysis (EA) indicates that the changes will have little impact on individuals with protected characteristics. The increasing powers to Township Forums and attempts to increase community engagement are however seen as positive in terms of improving community relations and cohesion.
- 5.2 Subject to approval by Council, the changes will be monitored and their impact reported to Annual Council in 2016.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Township Forums provide a unique opportunity for local councillors, community representatives and residents to work together to address local priorities and improve local outcomes.
- 6.2 This report outlines a number of areas which should help to further enhance the work of the Forums. Cabinet are requested to support the proposals and recommend to Council that:
- (i) The changes outlined in section 3 of this report are approved;
 - (ii) Recommend to the July meeting of Council that the Operational Framework for Township Forums is amended to include the new tasks and reduce the frequency of Township Forum meetings from six to four per year from 2015/16 and onwards.

List of Background Papers:-

Annual Progress Report – Township Forums (Full Council, 20 May 2015).
Township Forum Operating Framework
Localism Act 2011 - Community Right to Bid Guidance.
Equality Assessment

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TOWNSHIP FORUM QUESTIONNAIRE

We are seeking your view on the following proposals to our Township Forums. Your views are important to us so that we may provide a better service delivery to our communities

	RTNM			Bury East			Bury West			Radcliffe			Whitefield/Unsworth			Prestwich			COMBINED			% OF 72		
	Agree	Do n't	N/ A	Agree	Do n't	N/ A	Agr ee	Do n't	N/ A	Agr ee	Do n't	N/ A	Agree	Don't	N/A	Agr ee	Do n't	N/ A	Agr ee	Do n't	N/ A	Agree	Don't	N/A
Presentations: Review protocols to reduce number of generic presentations at meetings	7			12			4	1		9		2	15	8	4	5	1	4	52	10	10	72 %	14 %	14 %
Pop-up information stands: Introduce a local 'market place' at each meeting. This will involve erection of stands/stalls providing details of any ongoing consultations and relevant community information - reducing need for presentations	6	1		11	1		4	1		8	1	2	21	5	1	8		2	58	9	5	81 %	13 %	7%
GMP Partnership: Explore opportunities to formalise Police involvement in the Township Forums	6	1		12			5			11			25	1	1	9	1		68	3	1	94 %	4%	1%
Frequency of Meetings: Reduce number of meetings from 6 to 4 per year	3	3	1	9	2	1	3	2		2	8	1	9	15	3	2	7	1	28	37	7	39 %	51 %	10 %
Engagement: Promote other engagement mechanisms, including Councillor surgeries, use of social media, Health Watch, Patient Cabinet	4	2	1	11		1	3	2		10	1		16	1	10	9	1		53	7	12	74 %	10 %	17 %

etc...																		
Localism Act: Explore opportunities for Forums to develop a stronger role in relation to key aspects of the Act, particularly the Community Right to Bid (Assets of Community Value)	5	2	6	6	4	1	9	2	13	14	5	5	42	1	29	58 %	1%	40 %
Funding: Delegate decisions to Township Forums relating to combined Small Grants/Community Fund pots	6	1	9	1	2	5	7	1	3	21	2	4	7	1	2	55	6	11