

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2010/2011 REPORT NO. 228

MEETING TITLE AND DATE:

Council 6th April 2011

REPORT OF:

Director of Finance and
Corporate Resources

Agenda – Part: 1	Item: 9
Subject: Area Forum Review	
Wards: All	
Cabinet Members consulted: Councillors Achilleas Georgiou, Chaudhury Anwar and Del Goddard	

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report deals with a review of the Council's Area Forums. The new administration has requested a review to improve engagement with Enfield's local communities and take account of emerging issues.
- 1.2 The review sought the views of residents, members and officers. In total 155 individual comments were received via e-mail, feedback form or from the minutes of the Area Forum (AF) meetings.
- 1.3 The analysis of the responses and comments provided a number of common themes and these have been included within the body of this report. The comments received from Members are set out in Appendix 1.
- 1.4 The report provides recommendations for consideration by Cabinet/Full Council and focuses around:
 - The role of the AF's
 - The structure of AF's - revised clustering of wards
 - The frequency and location of the AF's
 - The format of the meetings including seating and provision of information by Council and other local service providers

The report includes comments and views from CMB.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the following options recommended by Cabinet are adopted:

- 1. Developing Role of Area Forums** – Option 3 in Table 1 of the report.
This would allow the Council to retain elements of the current format of the meeting but adding issues such as developing links with CAPEs, attendance by Enfield Homes and Youth Area Forums.
- 2. Structure of Area Forums** - Option 3 in Table 2 of the report.
This would allow retention of 3 wards per Area Forum across the Borough but would permit the clusters to be changed to reflect views received from residents and Members.
- 3. Frequency and Location of Area Forums** - Option 4 in Table 3 of the report.
This would allow the Area Forums to continue to meet 4 times a year but additional venues would be sought where practical.
- 4. Format Including Seating and Provision of Information.** Option 3 in Table 4 of the report is favoured. This provides for a change to allow information to be provided in advance. The seating would also change to a style that allows round table discussion.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Council has 7 Area Forums (AF) with fixed boundaries and memberships. They each comprise 3 wards and are as follows:

- Bowes, Southgate and Southgate Green
- Bush Hill Park, Palmers Green and Winchmore Hill
- Chase, Southbury and Town
- Cockfosters, Grange and Highlands
- Edmonton Green, Haselbury and Upper Edmonton
- Enfield Highway, Enfield Lock and Turkey Street
- Jubilee, Lower Edmonton and Ponders End

Each Forum meets 4 times a year with a mixed approach. For some Forums the venues for meetings are moved between each ward for others it is not. Each Forum has been asked for its views. The Forums have been reviewed on a number of occasions in recent years following previous consultation exercises with residents and Forum Chairs.

3.2 The core functions of the Forums are shown below:

1. Identify, investigate and make recommendations on issues of importance to the area

2. Respond to consultation exercises about strategic issues, where the views of local communities are sought (e.g. the Community Strategy) - acting as the point of contact for the community to express their views
3. Act as consultee for the area on planning policy
4. Monitor and comment on the services provided by the council within their area
5. Review the wider activities and issues within the area, including consideration of issues arising from other agencies providing services within the area
6. Develop and support partnership working, consultation and participation between the statutory and voluntary sectors and business, in relation to local issues
7. Provide a link between the local community and the Council, particularly in relation to the Cabinet and the scrutiny function.

CONSULTATION

3.3 As part of the review process consultation has taken place with councillors, officers and residents. This was led by a number of Cabinet members who attended each of the Forums. In total 155 individual comments were received via email, feedback form or the minutes of the AF meetings. In addition the feedback includes the collective view of the Area Forums. The key issues covered were as follows:

1. The function/s of the Area Forums (AF)
2. The structure and wards that make up the AF's

In addition residents views were sought as part of the review process where Area forums considered the following questions:

1. What do local residents want and expect from their Area Forums?
2. How can Area Forums be used to best engage with the local community and generate useful debate?
3. How else can the local community engage with the Council and their elected councillors?
4. How can the work of the Area forums be made more meaningful?

The feedback from the Forums consists of responses and comments. The analysis of the responses and comments provided a number of common themes and these have been included within the body of this report.

4.0 OPTIONS and PROPOSALS

What is Required and Expected from AF's

4.1 Analysis of the consultation provided a number of consistent themes and these are shown below:

- Forum agendas should be structured so as to reflect local needs and permit time to encourage effective consultation and information sharing;
- Engagement is needed with wider parts of the community, including younger people, BAME groups, local businesses and employers, Council partners, etc;
- There should be an opportunity for residents to discuss issues with their own Ward Councillors in break out groups;
- Publicising the meetings needs to be improved so as to encourage community participation; and
- The feedback from issues raised at meetings should be faster

Table 1 shows options considered in addressing the need to develop the AF, retaining what works well and taking account of the views of those who responded to the consultation.

Option 3 allows the Council to retain the current format of the meeting and includes some of the emerging issues.

In reviewing community engagement it has been recognised that the timing and format does not suit all elements of community in Enfield, but no one format will meet this need. It is therefore, proposed to develop links with existing engagement processes such as CAPEs and the Youth Area Forums that allow their views to be included. This could include but is not limited to these groups referring issues to the AF rather than requiring attendance.

Table 1 Options for developing the Area Forums

Option	Strength	Weakness	Risk
1. No change	The role of the Forums is well understood by members and the residents who attend	The Forums have not achieved what they sought to in some of the areas No link to other local engagement processes	The Forums would not link with other agendas for increased community engagement such as the Youth Forums or the CAPEs. There is also a risk of continued duplication.
2. Review and change the rationale completely e.g. by amalgamating with other types of local forums and widening the remit	Would provide for a strategic review of the AFs alongside other changes involving community engagement	May take longer to complete.	May not be supported by all.
3. A mixture of retaining elements of the current rationale and adding issues such as Enfield Homes and develop links with the CAPEs, Youth Area Forums	Would retain the strengths in the current rationale whilst allowing some change to meet the Council's aspirations	Developing effective links may take some time Some groups may never engage in this way e.g. BAME, Young People	Still may not develop and increase resident engagement

4.2 Ward Clusters

The current ward clusters that make up the AFs are based around geographical proximity. In reviewing the role and function of the Forums a number of issues have come to light from those who have attended Area Forums. It is not possible to show all the comments received from the consultation in this paper but some of the common themes around structure are shown below:

- Agendas should reflect local priorities
- There should be more dialogue with local communities
- Each ward Councillor should give a report on local issues
- If Forums consisted of two wards then the meetings could be held more centrally

- Hold a Forum in each Ward

Further, members have also asked for options on better clustering of wards to reflect the views provided by attendees of the Forums.

Table 2 provides options considered with regard to the structure of the AF's.

Option 3 allows retention of 3 wards per AF across the borough but permits the clusters to be changed to reflect comments and views received from residents and members.

The text in bold highlights the changes:

- Bowes, **Palmers Green** and Southgate Green
- Bush Hill Park, **Grange** and Winchmore Hill
- Chase, Southbury and Town
- Cockfosters, **Southgate** and Highlands
- Edmonton Green, Haselbury and Upper Edmonton
- Enfield Highway, Enfield Lock and Turkey Street
- Jubilee, Lower Edmonton and Ponders End

Options 5 and 6 allow for a reduction in the overall number of AF's by increasing the number of wards in each Forum. This has the potential to deliver a financial saving to the Council. (See Financial Implications paragraph 7.1), This also reduces the administrative burden.

Table 2 Options for how the Forums may be structured

Option	Strength	Weakness	Risk
1. No Change	The role of the Forums is well understood by members and those residents who attend Manageable with current staffing levels	Many comments suggest that the structure of the Forum should change and there is some level of dissatisfaction	Residents feel they have not been listened to Lack of relevance to locality will continue
2. Move to 21 Forums reflecting the ward boundaries	This would provide Forum meetings within Ward boundaries and thus provide a real sense of locality. Alignment with CAPEs	This is potentially costly if the frequency of meetings does not change. High demand of some of the key officers time	May not be sustainable with budget and workforce pressures

Option	Strength	Weakness	Risk
3. Review clusters to enhance commonality retaining 3 wards per AF	Would reflect some of the themes raised by the consultation	Some forums may still have wards which are felt to be remote from each other Would not provide savings to the Council	Could be perceived as little or no change
4. Cluster wards on a co-related basis with a variable number of wards per AF (not necessarily geographic proximity)	Allows for greater flexibility in the AF structure	Not all AF's would have the same number of wards. Non standard approach may lead to larger ward groupings for some AF's and may reduce localism	Could be perceived as being unfair
5. Increase the number of Wards in each AF and thus reduce the number of AF's	More efficient use of resources and will provide a financial saving Allows a more strategic approach over a larger area	Larger ward groupings for AF's may reduce the feeling of localism. Would preclude equal number of wards in each AF	Reduce local residents engagement if the AF's become more strategic
6. Replace with Constituency Forums for Enfield , 7 wards per Forum	More efficient use of resources and will provide a financial saving Allows a more strategic approach over a larger area Potential to engage MP's	Larger ward groupings for AF's may reduce the feeling of localism Chairing of meetings would require great skill as 21 Councillors would be attending each Forum.	Larger groupings of wards may reduce residents sense of affiliation and identification with local issues Large number of issues may be raised

4.3 Frequency and Location of meetings

The current AFs meet on a quarterly basis and are held in different locations across the ward clusters. With the 7 Forums this means that there are a total of 28 meeting per year.

It is not possible to show all the comments received in this paper but some of the common themes around structure are shown below:

- Times and locations should vary
- Once or twice a year Forums could be divided into ward groups for people to discuss issues with their ward councillors
- Each meeting could be divided into ward groups for people to discuss issues with their ward councillors
- Reduce the number of wards in each Forum, but also reduce the number of Forum meetings

Table 3 provides options regarding the frequency and location of AF's. Option 2 allows for a reduction in the number of times the AF's meet from 4 to 3 per year. This has the potential to provide a financial saving to the Council. Option 4 allows for the current frequency of meetings to continue but additional venues would be sought where practical.

Table 3 Options for Frequency and Locations

Option	Strength	Weakness	Risk
1. Continue with the current frequency and locations	Locations are well known to those who attend	May not increase engagement	Residents feel they have not been listened to
2. Reduce the number of Forum meetings to 3 or 2 per year	Less cost and more manageable	There would be a month's greater gap than at present (or 3 months' greater gap) between meetings, so issues may be less timely.	Potential for less engagement and perceived lack of urgency
3. Increase the number of Forum meetings and locations	Allows a more rapid response to issues	This is potentially costly High demand on some of the key officers time	May not be sustainable in the current economic climate
4. Continue with current frequency but increase the number of locations	May increase engagement with meetings held on a more local basis	May not increase engagement	Lack of suitable locations

4.4 Format including seating and provision of information

The format of the AFs is around provision of information and consultation on relevant issues by the Council and partners including the Police. The information varies but tends to focus on what has happened in relation to environmental and crime matters and also includes planned works or crime reduction initiatives. The Forums also provide a venue for local residents to raise particular issues of concern and service improvement such as street lighting and meet their Ward Councillors.

The Forums operate with members sitting at a table in committee format and residents sitting in a theatre style. Presentations are made by Council officers and partners with residents having the opportunity to ask questions.

It is not possible to show all the comments received, but some of the common themes around structure are shown below

- More inclusive seating plan
- Have discussion groups at Forums
- Everyone seated around tables rather than facing a panel of Councillors
- Include focus groups to discuss specific interests

A number of people have raised issues around the format and how information is provided. Members who have responded also wish to see a change in the format of the meetings of the AF's. Options are shown below. Option 3 is favoured which provides for a change to allow information to be provided in advance. This has the potential to reduce the demand on officers time. When actions are taken on issues raised these can be posted on the Council's website. This would also provide a speedier response to issues raised by residents. The thrust of these is to allow more time for members to engage in discussion and debate with residents. The seating would also change to a style that allows round table discussion with members feeding back to the main meeting or providing written comments to officers who record the minutes and deal with follow-up actions.

Table 4 Options for Format seating and provision of information

Option	Strength	Weakness	Risk
1. Continue with the current seating plan	Everyone who attends hears the whole discussion and can contribute	Less time for debate in an informal manner	Some may dislike this. Seating plan not inclusive
2. Change to café style	Allows for better engagement of residents in smaller groups	May be costly if officers are expected to record discussions (community may be minded to record or feedback to main	Some may dislike this as they will not be able to hear all views and comments made at the meeting.

		meeting) Not everyone would hear all issues.	May allow individuals to dominate
		Records may not reflect discussion	Others may find this approach intimidating
3. Change to café style. Less formal presentations more use made of handouts and website. Restructure agenda to allow for more discussion. Make more use of ward based breakout groups with round table discussion	Information is provided to community in written briefings before the meeting but greater flexibility for use of time at the Forum meetings	May be costly if officers are expected to record discussions at each table Records may not reflect discussion	Some may not feel they have direct access to key officers May allow individuals to dominate
4. Continue with current seating style but provide information in advance	Everyone who attends hears the whole discussion and can contribute and leaves more time for community debate	Will not allow the more informal and close engagement that smaller groups provide	Less inclusivity

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 Alternative Options are shown in the body of the report

6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The new administration has laid out its vision and is committed to **fairness for all, growth and sustainability** and **strong communities**. It is further committed to tackling inequalities and providing high quality services for all.

Strong communities

Building strong, cohesive and resilient communities will be vital as Enfield continues to grow and change as a borough. We want Enfield to be a place where people feel proud to live, where people from all

different backgrounds are welcomed and supported, where vulnerable people are protected, and where people take responsibility for their own lives and their communities.

Priorities are to:

- Encourage active citizenship. Involving and engaging local people of all ages in the decisions that affect their lives is central to our approach. We will give people more opportunities to influence the issues that matter to them, and to shape the environment in which they live. In particular we will give vulnerable adults and older people more choice and control over the quality of their life and care.
- Listen to the needs of local people and be open and accountable. Trust in public institutions is at a historic low, and we will need to demonstrate that we are open and accountable to rebuild our relationship with residents.
- As an organisation, we will listen to and shape our services around the needs of local people.

As part of this and in order to improve the engagement with community the administration has requested a review of Area Forums.

7. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND CORPORATE RESOURCES AND OTHER DEPARTMENTS

7.1 Financial Implications

The current costs of the Area Forums are met from the Committee Secretariat budget. There are estimated to be 1.5 FTE engaged full time on organising and running the forums. This cost, and the incidental costs of venue hire, printing, advertising and other miscellaneous expenses are estimated to be £66k p.a. Any savings on these costs would be dependant on the option selected, e.g. if Table 2, option 6 was selected (3 Constituency Forums, quarterly : 12 Forums) it may be possible to reduce the FTE by a third, saving approximately £18k pa. The incidental costs are unlikely to reduce by the same percentage, and there may be redundancy implications which cannot be quantified at this time. If the number of Forum meetings were reduced this would require less attendance from council officers from various departments. Although there is no direct financial saving, this would provide an opportunity saving as they would be available for planning and service delivery instead.

7.2 Legal Implications

The Local Government Act 1972 provides that a local authority may convene Area Forums as it sees fit.

The Council has a statutory obligation to consult and involve the public in relation to certain issues and Area Forums can play a major role in

consultation by providing the opportunity for debate, oral representations and petitions on any local issue.

Area Forums are bodies of the Council and operate within a policy framework and rules adopted by the Council. The fixed boundaries, membership and terms of reference and the Area Forum Rules of Procedure are set out in Part 2 and Part 4 of the Council's constitution respectively and any amendments must be agreed by a majority at a meeting of the full council. The Council should be satisfied that to do so will ensure improved service delivery in the context of best value and more efficient, transparent and accountable decision making.

7.3 Property Implications

None

8. KEY RISKS

- 8.1 Risks identified against each option are set out in the individual tables within the main body of the report. There are risks relating to each option, however it is felt the suggested way forward will minimise risk whilst managing changes required to enhance engagement with local communities and to take account of emerging issues.

9. IMPACT ON COUNCIL PRIORITIES

9.1 Fairness for All

The AF's will seek to be more inclusive and increase the ability of Children, Young People and BAME communities to influence decisions in the wards.

9.2 Growth and Sustainability

The Forums will help to create stronger communities by securing greater involvement from local people within their communities and heightening engagement with the Council. Forums will also help refine and increase the effectiveness of services provided by the local authority.

9.3 Strong Communities

The AF's are a key tool to encourage active citizenship. Involving and engaging local people of all ages in the decisions that affect their lives is central to our approach. They will give people more opportunities to influence the issues that matter to them, and to shape the environment in which they live.

10. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Effective Area Forums will provide local information that will enable departments to better tailor their services to provide better outcomes and improved value for money. They will also contribute to achieving the Council objective of listening to the needs of local people and being open and accountable.

11. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

None

Background Papers

Working documents and files held by the Head of Corporate Scrutiny Services.