

LOCAL AREA FORUMS

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY; CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE

CABINET

23RD OCTOBER, 2003

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To consider the future of Local Area Forums and agree how the Local Area Forums should progress as a community consultation mechanism.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision

Recommendation

- THAT**
- (a) the proposals contained in the report be agreed as a framework for development;**
 - (b) further consultation on the details of the proposals is undertaken with groups listed under “consultees”;**
- and**
- (c) subject to the outcome of the consultation, necessary amendments to the Constitution be made by the County Secretary and Solicitor, for recommendation to Council for approval.**

Reasons

1. In August 2002, a paper outlining the progress of Local Area Forums since their inception in 1999 was taken to Cabinet. It outlined a number of areas for development under the current arrangements. Cabinet decided that a full-scale review be undertaken.
2. Consultation was undertaken with a number of groups connected to the Local Area Forums in order to establish a baseline against which to measure future developments and gain information on the key areas of future development.
3. The findings of the consultation have been used to formulate the following considerations.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Liz James; Policy Assistant. Telephone (01432)383400

Considerations

1. Due to the rural and urban nature of Herefordshire it is important to consider how the county is split up in order to accommodate Local Area Forums. Although a high number of Local Area Forums caters for the diverse nature of Herefordshire's geography, it can create resource issues and make coordination of timetables and agendas very difficult. The following proposal takes account of the different areas within Herefordshire whilst creating a manageable number of meetings:
 - The county to be split into 6 areas
 - The forums to be: North (Kington and Leominster regions), East (Bromyard and Ledbury), North-west (Dinmore and area), Hereford (City and South-Wye), Golden Valley and Ross-on-Wye.
2. The issue of what is discussed at meetings is vital to their success. Central to the consultation was the fact that Local Areas Forums should be consultative rather than informative. The following proposal seeks to ensure this:
 - Agenda items should state clearly whether they are consultative and how information from LAFs will be used
 - A summary report should be fed to Cabinet at the end of each round of meetings
 - The quality of Officer presentations should be standardised
 - Development work to be done on expanding agenda to partner organisations
 - Additional ad hoc meetings for important issues to be held
 - A cabinet member should be present at each meeting
 - The style of meeting should be inclusive of all members of the community. Development work on different approaches to facilitation should be undertaken
3. When and where Local Area Forums are held can be central to whether people attend or not. The following proposal is designed to ensure that the system is flexible to the needs of the public
 - Meetings to be held quarterly, with dates set well in advance
 - The initial choice of venue should be consulted on and consideration given to nearby public transport arrangements and Disability access
 - Refreshments should be provided for attendees
4. In order to ensure that the opportunity for the Community to attend is maximised, it is important that a strategic approach to advertising is undertaken
 - "The eyes" branding should be discontinued. For an interim period the apple logo can be used. The name "Local Area Forum" should be retained
 - The whole cycle of meetings should be advertised in the Hereford Times and

Journal

- Links with Parish Councils should be used for local advertising
 - Summaries of all meetings should be placed on the Council's website
 - Circulation of paper agendas prior to meetings should be abolished. Paperwork to comprise of an attendance register
 - The notion of Local Area Forum membership should also be discontinued as it creates an atmosphere of two-tier meetings which does not help foster an inclusive approach
5. Funding for the Local Area Forums will need further consideration. At present, most costs are met by the Chief Executive's Development Fund. Although this formula may be used to re-launch the meetings, albeit at a reduced level, it is not sustainable in the long term. Budgetary provision should be made that matches the constitutional commitment made to Local Area Forums
 6. Meetings should be reviewed on an annual basis, where performance is measured against the baseline set during consultation.
 7. There has been considerable pressure from the community to reinstate the Local Area Forums and to consult on any proposals for their re-introduction. It will be important for this consultation to be built in prior to the re-introduction of Local Area Forums.

Alternative Options

Alternative proposals can be drawn up at the request of Cabinet

Risk Management

The development of Local Area Forums is identified as a key action for Herefordshire Council in the following strategies:

- Comprehensive Performance Assessment Improvement Plan
- Local Public Service Agreement
- Community Involvement Strategy

To not successfully agree and implement development proposals could have a negative impact on the Council's ability to achieve the objectives set out in the above documents

Consultees

1. Group Leaders and Local Area Forum Chairs
2. Herefordshire Association of Local Councils
3. Community Development Ambition Group

4. Community Development Workers Forum
5. Local Area Forum Lead Officers and Clerks
6. All Local Area Forums

Background Papers

None identified.