

LOCAL AREA FORUMS

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE

CABINET

14TH APRIL, 2005

Wards Affected

None.

Purpose

To receive feedback on the January 2005 round of meetings and to consider the re-naming of the Local Area Forums.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

Recommendation

THAT the report be noted and the change of name from Local Area Forums to Community Forums be endorsed.

Reasons

It was agreed that issues raised and discussed at Local Area Forum meetings should be relayed to Cabinet after each round of meetings.

Re-naming the Local Area Forums was proposed after recent discussions with the Leader of the Council. The title Local Area Forum has lent itself to the unfortunate acronym "lafs", and it was felt that this gave a wrong impression of the purpose and status of the Forums. For the Forums to attract a substantial number of people, as is hoped, it is important to convey the message that they have a serious purpose in informing and consulting the community on Council matters affecting them.

Considerations

1. The Research Study conducted by the LGA in September 2004 (Making decisions locally - a survey of local authorities on area committees and area forums. Sept 2004 LGA alert 301/04) refers to 'Area Forums' and this is used in many authorities where communities are scattered.
2. Simply dropping the word 'local' and using 'Area Forums' would attract the least attention. The Forums have been relaunched already, and a radical name change would look like another relaunch. However, it might not be different enough to prevent people continuing to refer to LAFs. The worst outcome would be that the change of name would not achieve the intention, necessitating a further change later. The recommended option is 'Community Forum'. This could be presented as a positive change reflecting more accurately the nature of the Forums.

3. This change would require some publicity to avoid confusion, but kept low-key by adding (formerly Local Area Forums) on all publicity and correspondence for the first and second round of Forums after the change of name had been agreed. The Chairmen of the Forums could also announce the change of name.
4. General Issues:- Meetings held during January varied in terms of the number of members of the public attending. Where there was strong interest in a local issue, as in North Herefordshire, 70 members of the public attended, whereas only four members of the public attending in East Herefordshire. However, turnout is generally low in this area. Attendance at other meetings varied between 12 and 28. The East Herefordshire meeting was closed early due to venue difficulties, and the item on Polytunnels for that area will be discussed at a future meeting.
5. Summary of Agenda Items:- Youth Services appeared on the agenda in five of the six areas, but In Ross-on-Wye, the speaker on Youth Services was unable to attend. North Herefordshire had a full agenda and therefore it was not included. Youth Services will be on a future agenda in both areas. Community Policing was discussed at two meetings, and Emergency Planning at three of the meetings.
6. Local Interest Items:- The North Herefordshire Forum was entirely taken up by local issues, including the HGV survey and traffic at Bargates, and proposals for Grange House in Leominster. Other local issues were Primary Schools for Central Herefordshire, the proposed refurbishment of Eign Gate and possible pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street for Hereford City, and Polytunnels in East Herefordshire, which was postponed to a future meeting.
7. Summary of the Meetings:- Appendix 1 contains details of each meeting, and the questions raised.

Risk Management

None

Consultees

Local Area Forum Chairmen, Cabinet Members and the Leader of the Council.

Appendices

Report of Forum meetings and questions raised.