

## Community Forums

### Council, item 17

**Committee:** COUNCIL

**Date:** 18 MAY 2010

**Title:** COMMUNITY FORUMS

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**Agenda Item**

**17**

Item for  
decision

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### Summary

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the recent review of the Community Forums undertaken by the Constitution Working Group.

### Recommendations

Members note the report.

### Background Papers

Previous Committee Reports.

### Impact

Communication/Consultation	The public, town and parish councils, Essex Police, Essex County Council Highways Department and the Uttlesford Primary Care Trust have all contributed towards the development of the Forums
Community Safety	Police and crime and disorder reduction partnership involvement in the Forums ensures that the important issue of fear of crime can be addressed by communicating actual facts relating to crime in the district which continues to be low.
Equalities	None
Finance	None
Health and Safety	None
Human Rights	None
Legal implications	None
Sustainability	Regular communication with the community

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	on a range of topics contributes towards effective planning of initiatives.
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

### Situation

- 1 The Constitution Working Group approved the development of the Multi-agency Community Forums in 2008.
- 2 It was decided at the Council meeting in May 2009 that the Terms of Reference would be reviewed by the Constitution Working Group and reported to the Council meeting in May 2010.
- 3 Broadly, the Terms of Reference are still appropriate for the current level of operation.
- 4 Outcomes from the forums are processed via the Committee Structure – there is a standard item on the Community & Housing Committee for feedback from the Community Forums and progression of any issues. Similarly, there is the facility for feeding items through the Environment Committee as well. However, the question has been raised as to whether a parent committee should now be identified to take decisions relating to the operation of the community forums or whether the decision should continue to be made by the Full Council meetings.
- 5 The Constitution Working Group considered the following recommendations:
  - a) Agree to retain the existing Terms of Reference
  - b) Decide whether or not Full Council continues to be the parent committee for the community forums
  - c) Whether or not the forums administer the community project grants scheme
  - d) Consider strengthening the links with the Local Strategic Partnership either by having a regular feedback item at every forum meeting, and/or whether the forums should be administered by the Local Strategic Partnership rather than the District Council.
- 6 Members decided that as there was only one year left of the current Administration it would be appropriate to leave the system unchanged for the next year. The new Council could then decide on any changes it wished to make.

Therefore, the following was agreed:

  - a) retain the existing terms of reference for the community forums

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- b) full council continuing to be the parent committee for the community forums
- c) no change regarding administering the community grants scheme (which was not possible anyway due to the political imbalance of the forums)
- d) no change regarding LSP involvement.

7 However, Members further discussed the operation of the forums, making the following points:

- There was an element of duplication at meetings - often the same agencies gave updates, resulting in a feeling that no new ground was broken.
- Some parish councils perceived the forums as no more than 'talking shops'.
- District councillors could encourage parish council representatives to attend.
- Different agencies should be invited, such as the water and electricity supply companies - it was noted it was originally agreed that agencies to be invited would be statutory bodies, however, Members felt there was no reason why other services could not be invited, perhaps for specific themes.
- With regard to the community project grant scheme. Members noted the Chairman of Community and Housing Committee had delegated powers to make awards. It was suggested a list of grants awarded could be made available at forums.
- Members discussed the recent policy of themed forums. Agreeing the themes well in advance would be helpful to agencies to get them to think ahead. However, flexibility needed to be retained to deal with ad hoc issues which might come up.
- The LSP could be linked to the forums by issues regarding the LSP being fed into the relevant committee, and vice versa. It was further agreed that the LSP could be the subject of a themed meeting.

Officers to take the above into account when planning meetings for the coming year.