

**Committee:** COUNCIL

**Agenda Item**

**Date:** 21<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2009

**12**

**Title:** REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE OF AREA FORUMS

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Item for decision

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## Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the outcome of the survey undertaken regarding the operation of the Multi-agency Community Forums at the end of the one year pilot.

## Recommendations

2. The agencies involved and the majority of the public surveyed have indicated that the Multi-agency Community Forums should continue to operate in the same way for the future (albeit with some minor amendments to the format) it is recommended that Members approve the continuation of the forums.

## Background Papers

3. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

Notes of original working group and Committee Report proposing Multi-agency Community Forums be piloted. Completed questionnaires

## Impact

- 4.

Communication/Consultation	Listed within the report
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	No specific issues
Finance	N/A
Human Rights	N/A

Legal implications	N/A
Sustainability	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	N/A
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

## Situation

5. The Council launched Area Panels in 2006, with the district divided into three areas: North, South West and East Area Panels. The panels followed a formal committee process i.e. set agenda and minutes, with Members making decisions following the presentation of reports. The public were invited to comment at specific times. Partner agencies were also invited to make presentations to one of the meetings, depending on the topic. Four meetings were held in each location within the calendar year. At the final meetings of the Area Panels the public were asked to provide feedback on the process. Whilst this process was an important step in encouraging the community to attend Council organised meetings, one of the main criticisms was that people felt they were just observing a committee process rather than having involvement in the topics discussed.
6. Following the operation of the Area Panels, working groups were set up to look at ways of improving upon the process. The working group which contained representation from Essex Police concluded that it would be a good idea to pilot Multi-agency Community Forums with all of the key agencies working in Uttlesford represented.
7. The purpose of the Multi-Agency Community Forums was to
  - consult with town and parish councils, local community representatives and the general public on all matters relating to services provided by the participating agencies, in particular, to seek views to inform Uttlesford Futures, the Local Strategic Partnership, of the community's requirements
  - agree that agency representatives and council officers pursue matters arising from the meetings through the appropriate formal channels (in the case of the district council by investigation and reporting through the main committee structure)
  - provide information to the community on services and proposed initiatives
  - provide an open forum for the community to identify requirements and provide feedback on success or otherwise of services and initiatives

- develop a co-ordinated multi-agency working approach to resolve problems and to contribute to future planning applications/developments.
  - facilitate round table discussions between residents/town/parish and district councillors on relevant matters.
8. The Multi-agency Community Forums were introduced as a one year pilot in 2008 with the district divided into two areas i.e. North and South Community Forums, aligning with Essex Police's areas:

<b>North Uttlesford Community Forum</b>	Ashdon, the Chesterfords, Clavering, Littlebury, Newport, Thaxted, Saffron Walden Audley, Saffron Walden Castle, Saffron Walden Shire, The Sampfords, Wenden Lofts, Wimbish and Debden
<b>South Uttlesford Community Forum</b>	Barnston and High Easter, Birchanger, Broad Oak, The Eastons, and The Hallingburies, Elsenham, Felsted, Great Dunmow South, Great Dunmow North, Hatfield Heath, the Rodings, Stansted South, Stansted North, Stebbing, Stort Valley and Takeley.

9. Three meetings took place during 2008/09 with representation from Uttlesford District Council, Essex County Council's Highways Department, Essex Police, NHS West Essex and the Voluntary Sector.
10. At the end of the pilot a consultation process took place to determine the way forward
- Press release sent to local press.
  - Press releases were put in Uttlesford Life part of Essex Matters which is distributed to every household in Uttlesford.
  - Questionnaires were distributed at January's round of Multi-Agency Forums.
  - E-mails were sent to Parish Clerks and e-mail distribution list (interested parties and previous attendees of Community Forums).
11. The detailed questions, answers and general comments are provided at Appendix 1. However, the salient points are outlined below:

<b>Question</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Q5 & Q6	Venue locations	Inconclusive
Q7	Meeting start time	7.30 p.m. preferred
Q8	Multi-agency approach	Preferred
Q9	Meeting to concentrate on one	No

	agency/main topic/set agenda	
Q10	Agency updates	Preferred
Q11	Opportunity to ask questions	Preferred
Q12	Open table discussions	Preferred
Q13	Questions and answers collated and sent out	Preferred
Q14	Questions at end of presentations and after open table discussions	Preferred

## Conclusion

The outcome of the consultation shows that there is support for the multi-agency forum approach to continue and that people largely like the current format. Although, the general comments make a number of suggestions that can be followed up by officers in order to try to further improve the effectiveness of the forums.

The multi-agency community forums enable all of the agencies involved to fulfil community engagement requirements and specifically are an appropriate way of encouraging local people to influence decisions made by key agencies. The forums comply with the aspirations of the Empowerment White Paper – “Communities in Control” and provide the District Council and Uttlesford Futures with an appropriate communication and consultation mechanism. Whilst there are other forms of community engagement that can be further explored by officers the forums are an important component of a community involvement process.

## Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Abandoning the multi-agency forums would result in loss of community engagement for all agencies involved	3	3	Continue forums and explore further community engagement opportunities

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project

APPENDIX 1

**Results of Multi-agency Community Forums Questionnaire**

<b>Responses from the South</b>				<b>Responses from the North</b>		
<b>Q1 Which area do you live in?</b>						
South		<b>26</b>		North		<b>14</b>
<b>Q2 Have you attended a Multi-Agency Community Forum?</b>						
Yes – <b>24</b>	No – <b>2</b>	No response – <b>0</b>		Yes - <b>13</b>	No- <b>0</b>	No response – <b>1</b>
<b>Q3 Have you attended an Area Forum?</b>						
Yes – <b>15</b>	No – <b>5</b>	No response – <b>6</b>		Yes – <b>4</b>	No - <b>2</b>	No response – <b>8</b>
<b>Q4 Do you prefer having a fixed meeting, e.g. Dunmow/Saffron Walden?</b>						
Yes – <b>12</b>	No - <b>14</b>	No response – <b>0</b>		Yes – <b>12</b>	No – <b>1</b>	No response – <b>1</b>
<b>Q5 Do you prefer having the meetings predominately in fixed locations, with the option of holding One of the South meetings in a fixed venue i.e. Stansted?</b>						
Yes – <b>10</b>	No – <b>13</b>	No response – <b>3</b>		Yes – <b>4</b>	No - <b>9</b>	No response – <b>1</b>

<b>Q6 Do you prefer having all of the meetings in different locations each time?</b>						
Yes – 10	No – 15	No response – 1		Yes - 1	No – 13	No response – 0
<b>Q7 What time do you think the meetings should start?</b>						
7.00 pm - 6	7.30 pm – 20	No response – 0		7.00 pm – 2	7.30 pm – 11	No response – 1
<b>Q8 Do you prefer having a multi-agency approach with all the agencies available at each meeting?</b>						
Yes – 19	No – 5	No response - 2		Yes – 11	No - 2	No response – 1
<b>Q9 Do you prefer having one of the agencies available as the main topic with a set agenda?</b>						
Yes – 9	No – 11	No response - 6		Yes – 3	No - 9	No response – 2
<b>Q10 Do you like the agencies to give an update at the beginning of the meeting?</b>						
Yes – 22	No – 3	No response - 1		Yes – 12	No - 2	No response – 0
<b>Q11 Do you like having the opportunity to ask the agencies questions?</b>						
Yes - 24	No - 0	No response - 2		Yes – 14	No - 0	No response - 0
<b>Q12 Do you think the open table discussions are useful?</b>						
Yes – 16	No - 4	No response - 6		Yes – 11	No - 2	No response - 1
<b>Q13 Do you like having the questions and answers from the meeting collated and sent out?</b>						
Yes -23	No – 2	No response - 1		Yes – 13	No – 0	No response – 1

<b>Q14 Are you happy with the questions at the end of the presentations and then at the end of the open table discussions?</b>						
Yes – 19	No - 3	No response - 4		Yes – 11	No - 2	No response – 1

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

**South**

- It is a shame they clash often with Parish Council meetings but there is no way that this can be avoided over such a large area with so many councils.
- I preferred the Area Panel Meetings, specific to one area
- Given the importance of Dunmow as a key centre, I'd recommend that some of the meetings are held here. Locating them all at Stansted would prevent many people locally from attending south area meetings, which would be regrettable, and would decrease public access to the democratic process.
- They are good.
- Better than old Area Panels.
- Generally good - sometimes passed over when I wish to ask a question.
- Would prefer more time for comment and questions and less information from individual agencies. Information on forthcoming meetings would be more useful given earlier due to deadlines
- The member agencies should be limited in order that the meeting does not become too protracted.
- Good to be able to question agencies, but not much interaction of public with District Councillors. Seems to lack teeth - e.g. Area Panel could have agreed to send letter to B/S CAB re funding. Forums cover large area so maybe 3/4 fixed venues
- Needs structure, more clear purpose and outcome. Unable to pass resolution expressing its opinion, diminishing its value on matters that are important and urgent. Should have hot drinks at "gossip" session - which are a waste of time as an interval. Have chatting at the end over hot drinks.
- Chairman only calls on questions from the well known Councillors and other ignored

- Set agenda is important/ Uttlesford issues - update waste/budgets/housing issue. other issues such as draft speed management policy from Essex CC should be identified - one as a major topic for each meeting - perhaps we could ask Essex CC Highways for a forward plan - also PCT and Police so we know what consultation/changes planned.
- If the meetings are in different locations, the agenda should concentrate on local issues. It's a waste of time discussing Stansted issues at Gt Dunmow for example.

### **North**

- There should be posters in the windows of local shops, advertisements throughout parish and town council websites and magazines. The meeting over loaded with councillors and lacking in members of the public.
- Interesting.
- Very useful.
- Would like the once a year Parish Council meeting with Uttlesford officers back
- Forums are becoming dominated by lobby groups which make them less useful for Parish Councillors



