

Protocol for Neighbourhood Forums.

The Council will establish 12 Neighbourhood Forums (the Forums).

The Area comprising a Forum will be the Local Electoral Ward.

Membership of the Forum will comprise the 3 elected councillors for the electoral ward.

Terms of Reference of the Forums.

- To engage with local residents, businesses and other community groups in their Ward.
- To promote the business of the Council and to undertake as they see fit consultation on Ward related matters.
- To manage a budget as allocated from time to time by the Council, for the purposes of meeting with residents, businesses and other community groups, and facilitating the enhancement the area and amenities of those living and working in the Forum area. This could include providing grants for community projects, match funding, or carrying out small projects.

Calling of Meetings.

A meeting of a Forum may be called by no less than 2 elected councillors for the Forum area signing and sending to the Head of Democracy and Governance formal notice of the calling of the meeting.

The notice will specify the name of the lead councillor for the purpose of organising the meeting and the proposed date, time and venue of the meeting, the intended subject matter and the estimated cost. If not signed by all 3 elected councillors for the area it will confirm that the third councillor has been notified of the intention to call the meeting and the date of that notification.

All notices must be given to the Head of Democracy and Governance no less than 10 working days before the date of the meeting to allow time for the meeting agenda to be published within the timescales under the Local Government Access to Information Regulations.

The lead councillor will be responsible for ensuring that any intended officers or outside representatives who are deemed necessary to attend the meeting are notified of the date and time and what they are expected to do, all appropriate publicity for the meeting and for the taking of the minutes of the meeting and that any reports are provided to the Head of Democracy and Governance for publication with the agenda no later than 7 working days before the date of the meeting,.

It must be clear on any publicity that the meeting is a meeting organised by Watford Borough Council.

The lead councillor will also be responsible for arranging the booking of the venue for the meeting and notifying the Head of Democracy and Governance who he/she will be receiving an invoice from and the anticipated amount.

The lead councillor will after the meeting supply the Head of Democracy and Governance with a copy of the minutes for publication no later than 7 working days after the date of the meeting.

All Forum meetings will be open to the public.

It will be for the elected councillors to decide how the business of the meeting is conducted.

Budget.

Each year Council will allocate a budget to each Forum.

It will be for the elected councillors to decide how the budget is spent subject to any specific instructions from Cabinet or Council.

The Head of Democracy and Governance will hold the budget for each Forum and will send to each councillor a statement at the beginning of each month setting out what has been spent to date, any commitments the Council has been notified of affecting the budget and how much budget remains. The statement will only reflect items that have been reported to the Council, the onus is on councillors to tell the Head of Democracy and Governance as soon as practicable all items of expenditure.

Once the allocated budget has been expended no subsequent requests for expenditure will be approved and any activities the Forum wishes to carry out will be at the expense of the elected councillors.

Should any money remain unspent at the end of the financial year then it will be lost, unless the elected councillors can make a case for carry forward for a specific project which will be subject to the approval of the Head of Finance.

Payment for meetings:

The lead councillor responsible for making the venue booking will notify the owner of the building to send an invoice to the Head of Democracy and Governance quoting the name of the Neighbourhood Forum and date of the meeting.

On receipt of the invoice the Head of Democracy and Governance will confirm with the lead councillor the amount agreed for the hire fee and that the date of the hiring is correct.

The Head of Democracy and Governance will then pay the invoice.

Payment for other items:

Prior to committing the Council to spending any of their Forum budget on items other than meetings the councillors must submit a proforma to the Head of Democracy and Governance or approval.

The pro forma must be signed off by no less than 2 of the councillors for the Forum area.

No project should be instigated if it will lead to the Council incurring ongoing revenue costs, unless previously discussed with the relevant Head of Service who has agreed that the ongoing revenue expenditure can be met from their existing budget.

The proforma will be forwarded to the Head of Service with responsibility for the provision of service most affected by the proposal for information, or approval where ongoing revenue expenditure is likely to be incurred.

In the latter case the Head of Service will notify both the elected councillors and the Head of Legal and Property Services of whether they can commit to the ongoing revenue costs within 21 working days of receiving it.

In the case of the project being likely to incur ongoing revenue costs the Head of Services decision will be final.

The Head of Democracy and Governance will raise an order and any invoice will be submitted to him/her for payment.

Should any invoice exceed the amount stated in the pro forma by more than 10% the Head of Finance and the councillors will be notified. If the final cost exceeds the amount left in the Forum budget the councillors who signed off the pro forma will be required to fund the excess equally from their remuneration allowance.

If the proforma is only signed by 2 councillors the 3rd councillor will be sent a copy of the proforma by the Head of Democracy and Governance for their information.

Councillors are advised to discuss any proposed projects with the relevant Head of Service at the earliest opportunity to avoid disappointment and managing community expectations.

The Forum must not be used for party political purposes.

Please refer to the 'Neighbourhood Forums – Guidelines for expenditure of Community Funds' for further guidance about using funds for projects.

Annual Report:

At the last Council meeting of the municipal year each Forum will present a report of its activities of the year, including details of its spending, meetings and projects.