

Review Update

Review: Neighbourhood Forums Review
Committee/Task Group: Neighbourhood Forums Task Group on behalf of Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee
Final report published: 9 March 2011
Cabinet/Executive response: Referred to Constitution Working Party on 30 March 2011
Chair: Councillor Kelly McLeod

Recommendation	Constitution Working Party comments	Scrutiny follow-up	Latest update	Further review required / completed
(1) In view of the mixed approach adopted by the wards, the name 'Community Engagement Fund' would be a more appropriate name than 'Neighbourhood Forums', which should only apply to the meetings held. The 'Community Engagement Fund' would be available for meetings or projects or a combination of the two.	<p>Recommendations endorsed by Working Party.</p> <p>The term 'Neighbourhood Forum' refers to the fact that they are based on individual wards.</p> <p>The fund can be known as Community Engagement Fund. <i>(Head of Legal and Property Services at meeting).</i></p>	None	<p>The funds can be used for projects and/or meetings. The Ward Councillors make this decision.</p> <p>Community Engagement Fund is used when referring to the budget for Neighbourhood Forums.</p>	

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<p>(2) The Neighbourhood Forum system is valuable and all members should be encouraged to consider how to use Neighbourhood Forums ('Community Engagement Funds') to achieve greater community engagement in tackling issues in their ward.</p>	<p>Recommendation endorsed</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>In 2011/12 all wards used some or all of their budget for meetings and/or projects. The Annual report to Council on 18 July 2011 includes full details of expenditure.</p>	
<p>(3) That the non-prescriptive system which allows wards to choose a) whether meetings are appropriate for their wards and b) how the meetings are organised be retained.</p>	<p>Recommendation endorsed</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>The Ward Councillors continue to decide whether to hold meetings within their wards and how to organise those meetings.</p> <p>A new guideline was produced in 2011 including information about the use of funds.</p> <p>New proforma were created in 2011 for the expenditure of the Community Engagement Fund for meetings or on projects.</p> <p>The new guidelines and proforma were circulated to all Councillors in 2011.</p>	

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(4) That the current system for project funding continue.	Recommendation endorsed	None	Each ward receives funding and can use it for meetings or projects. The current annual budget per ward is £2,500.	
(5) That councillors should return an annual report on their use of their Community Engagement Fund to Annual Council.	Recommendation endorsed	None	All wards are provided with a template and asked to complete the Annual report. The completed Annual Reports are then collated and presented to Council. The Annual Reports for 2011/12 were included on the agenda for Council on 18 July 2012.	

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<p>(6) Further and ongoing training is needed for all members to embed the process and improve performance:</p> <p>Training should cover –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process for the use of Community Engagement Funds both at the induction for new members and periodically for other members • Chairing skills for large public meetings • Planning effective and productive agendas • Management of the budget and appropriate projects for funding. 	<p>Recommendation endorsed</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>The training needs were forwarded to the Member Development and Civic Officer.</p> <p>At new Members' Induction the Democratic Services Manager includes a section on Neighbourhood Forums. Copies of the proforma and guidelines are included in their packs.</p> <p>In March a scrutiny training session was held called 'Chairing for Scrutiny'. This would also have been suitable for any Member interested in chairing other meetings.</p> <p>Members receive regular updates from Democratic Services about their budget. The new guidelines include information about activities which are not suitable.</p>	

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<p>(7) That there should be an agreed protocol as follows for inviting officers to Neighbourhood Forums:</p> <p>a) To invite the relevant officer with at least two weeks' notice informing them of the topic and format of the meeting</p> <p>b) To provide the officer with a short briefing about the topic to allow officers to be fully prepared.</p>	<p>Recommendation endorsed.</p> <p>The Constitution Working Party commented that in some cases more than two weeks' notice might be more appropriate.</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>The latest guidance states that the lead councillor is responsible for ensuring that officers and other representatives required at the meeting are notified of the date, time and venue of the meeting and what is expected of them. The notification of a meeting proforma includes a specific question in the checklist about this.</p>	
<p>(8) That twice a year each ward's councillors should contribute an update on their meetings and/or projects to a 'Community Engagement' round-up' feature in the council's About Watford magazine.</p>	<p>Recommendation endorsed – agreed that all Members should be given the opportunity to contribute an update on their meetings and projects.</p>	<p>None</p>		

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(9) That Members be encouraged to contribute examples of good practice in their Community Engagement Fund to the monthly members' bulletin.	Recommendation endorsed	None	There have been no contributions to the Members' Bulletin.	
<p>(10) That each ward makes contact with the following local partners, as recommended by the report on Community and Neighbourhood Engagement, introducing themselves and making them aware of the opportunities to engage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • representatives of the County Council • representatives of the police/Community Safety Partnership • representatives of the fire service • representatives of the PCT (this might be a GPs' surgery at local level) 	Recommendation endorsed	None	<p>During 2011/12, those wards which have held meetings have invited officers from the Borough Council and County Council, representatives from the Police and in one case the Manager of a large supermarket in the area to discuss residents' concerns.</p> <p><i>It would be appreciated if Councillors can feedback further on this recommendation.</i></p>	

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • representatives of the LSP (as individuals or representing the Partnership) • chairs of residents' associations • representatives of local schools • representatives of churches and faith groups • representatives of youth groups • representatives of local traders • representatives of voluntary sector organisations active in wards. 				

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<p>(11) That the sections of the website which give details of the Community Engagement Funds and residents' associations should be made more prominent. Ward councillors should contact the council's communications team to update details of their local residents' associations on the website.</p>	<p>Recommendation endorsed</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood Forum web page is located on the Council's website as a link from the 'Meetings and Agendas' link on the home page.</p> <p>Each ward has its own page on the Neighbourhood Forum section. It includes details of the 3 Ward Councillors, dates of forthcoming meetings and the Annual Reports.</p> <p>Details of residents' associations are available on the Council's website.</p>	