

COUNCIL PROPOSALS FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS

- It is proposed to establish neighbourhood forums that:
 - provide a key consultative mechanism for the Council
 - advise the Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees on issues of interest in their area
 - assist Councillors and other agencies to listen to and respond to their communities
 - build local partnerships
 - develop local neighbourhood plans
 - inform directly some decisions taken by the neighbourhood coordinator under delegated powers relating to the management and resourcing of certain services and projects.
- The forums where possible will be based on existing local representative partnerships or locally elected bodies. Where new arrangements are put into place they will be chaired initially by a Ward Councillor until local capacity, built up through training and support, exists for other arrangements to develop. Forums will be representative of local communities.
- Existing city wide communities of interest will continue to retain their role in the Councils consultative and decision making processes but where possible linked to the neighbourhood processes.
- The forums will incorporate some element of devolution of real budget decisions achieved by:
 - Bending in existing service spend where this is feasible
 - Incorporating existing regional, national and European Union funding streams where they apply
 - Providing when possible additional small 'top up' budgets for local allocation
- Around 10 forums to be developed in consultation with the Community Conference in the context of the emerging new Wards.
- It is proposed that the City Centre be managed as a separate and a distinct area of the city.
- It is proposed that implementation takes place across the city concurrently in order to promote real and whole system change from the outset.

From: Revitalising Neighbourhoods, Council Cabinet 25 February 2002

BOUNDARY PROPOSAL FOR TEN NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS



Note: City Centre Forum based on the area within the inner ring road

GUIDELINES ON CONSTITUTIONS FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS

USING THIS GUIDANCE

It has been agreed that neighbourhood forums will need to have constitutions. This is to make sure that important aspects of the way the forums will work are agreed and communicated clearly from the start.

Some of the elements of the constitution will have to be the same for all forums – as some decisions about how they will work have already been taken as a result of extensive consultation. But there are many elements that are left for the forums themselves to decide. For these elements, this guidance is intended as support, giving suggestions or options. In addition, there will be other things that the forum will want to add either at the outset, or as it develops and encounters new issues.

Examples of constitutions from similar forums in other parts of the UK and from existing forums in Leicester are available from the Policy and Performance Team in the Chief Executive's Office. Support and advice on constitutions and help in putting them together is available from the Committee Secretariat in the Resources, Access and Diversity Department.

CONTENTS OF CONSTITUTIONS

In this section, normal type is used for text that should be used as standard in the constitution for every forum. Type in italics is used for advice and suggestions.

NAME OF FORUM

The name of the forum is [insert name of forum] hereinafter referred to as 'the forum'.

AREA OF BENEFIT

The area of benefit shall be [insert]

The area of benefit is shown on a map appended to this constitution.

AIM

The aim of the forums will be to help communities and local services improve local outcomes by improving and joining up local services, and making them more responsive to local needs.

OBJECTIVES

The forum should specify its objectives. The following is taken from the guidance. This section of the constitution should reflect what has been agreed for the guidance, but it need not use the exact wording, and can be added to:

The forum will:

- *provide a key consultative mechanism for the Council and other agencies*
- *advise the Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees on issues of interest in their area*
- *help the Council and other agencies to listen to and respond to communities*
- *build local partnerships*
- *develop local area plans*
- *directly inform some decisions taken by the neighbourhood coordinator about to the management and resourcing of certain services and projects affecting the area*

ACTIVITIES

The forum may wish to specify the types of activities it will undertake to pursue its objectives. The following is taken from the guidance. This section of the constitution should reflect what has been agreed for the guidance, but it need not use the exact wording, and can be added to.

- *promote itself within the area to attract interest and involvement*
- *analyse data about the area*

- *analyse local opinion and attitudes*
- *involve local people in decision making*
- *map current resources and initiatives in the area*
- *work in partnership with other organisations in the area*
- *develop community capacity for involvement in decision making and community activity*
- *consult people in the area*
- *take decisions and give advice to service providers in the area*
- *create quick changes*
- *evaluate itself*
- *share good practice with other forums*

MEMBERSHIP

Who can be a member of the forum?

To be eligible to be a member of the forum a person must either:

- live in the area; or
- represent a local community group or forum that represents people who live in the area

Duration of membership

The constitution should specify whether membership is for a fixed term, and if so the length of the term.

Number of seats

The forum will have no less than x and no more than y seats.

How people become members of the forum

The constitution should say how people will become members of the forum.

Voting

It is intended that most of the forum's decisions will be reached by consensus.

However, the constitution will need to specify that where a vote is needed each member of the forum shall have one vote. It will also need to decide whether in the event of a tied vote the Chair shall have a second or casting vote. It might also want to specify that voting shall be by a show of hands or any other method determined by the Chair and agreed by the forum before the votes are cast.

Co-options

The forum may want to co-opt people on to the forum. If so the constitution will need to say what the arrangements are for this. Note that normally co-optees do not have a vote.

Substitutions

Some people will be on the forum representing a local community groups. The forum may want to specify in the constitution whether that group may send substitute representatives in the absence of the usual representative.

Acting in the public interest

In many ways, people will be on the forum precisely because they have a personal interest in the area in which they live. Specific issues may arise in the area in which people have a direct personal interest – eg plans for a school that a members' children attend or plans for a road development where the member lives. It is felt that this level of personal interests is appropriate to the role of forums.

In these early days forums will not be taking direct executive decisions about issues or services, so it is thought that measures such as registers and declarations of interest are not necessary at this stage. However this will need to be reviewed when forums develop and if they are given greater responsibilities.

In the meantime, it has been agreed that when a person becomes a member of a forum, he or she is asked to abide by a Code of Conduct for Forum Members, and signs a declaration that he or she will abide by the Code of Conduct during membership of the forum. The code of conduct is set out below and should form part of the constitution of the forum.

Suspension or termination

The constitution will need to specify the conditions under which members can be suspended from the forum or have their membership terminated. This could include:

- *if a member who is a resident moves out of the area*
- *if a member from a community group ceases to be part of that group*
- *failure to attend meetings - for example failure to attend three consecutive meetings without a satisfactory explanation*
- *disorderly conduct at meetings as ruled by the chair on x occasions*

The constitution will need to specify how the decision to suspend or terminate a persons membership of the forum would be reached - eg by a two thirds of the total membership majority vote. It may also need to say whether the person concerned has a right of appeal.

Conflicts with employment

If the forum discusses any matter that is directly relevant to a member's responsibilities as an employee (including employment with the City Council) they must declare an interest as soon as possible during the meeting.

Declarations of Interest

If an issue being discussed at a forum meeting affects a forum member personally to a much greater degree than it affects other people in the area generally, the forum member should declare an interest as soon as possible during the meeting. The member can still participate and vote.

MEETINGS

Frequency of meetings

The forum may want to specify the frequency of meetings in the constitution. [we may have to say what is maximum that can be supported by the resources in cttee secretariat]

Calling meetings

The forum may wish to specify who will be responsible for calling meetings, for example the secretary in conjunction with the chair.

Types of meetings and other events

The forum may want to specify in its constitution the types of meetings it will have - eg ordinary meetings, annual meetings, conferences etc. They may decide to have meetings and events specially designed for particular sections of the community – eg an event to appeal to young people. Or they may have meetings and events designed to cover particular topics eg crime in the area.

Working Groups/Sub Groups

The forum may want to specify that it may choose to establish working groups to look at particular issues in more depth. The constitution could specify that the membership and the terms of reference for the working group would need to be agreed by the forum.

Format of meetings

The forum may wish to say what the usual format for meetings will be.

Public involvement

Forums will need to decide how far the public will be involved in forum meetings, and this should be set out in the constitution.

There are a range of options for public involvement. The public could be asked for their views on each item on the agenda as it arises, or there could be an opportunity at the end for the public to say what they think on the issues covered. The forum may want to widen the focus of public involvement by having a session in which people raise any issues they are concerned about. If so, there are some key issues that need to be taken into account:

- *should there be time limit for people speaking?*
- *should it be made clear that individual cases cannot be raised. Council 'cases' ought to go to local Councillors surgeries?*
- *what mechanism will be used for taking up issues raised by the public? How will progress on these issues be reported and will standards on reporting back be set –eg that there will be a report back by the next meeting?*
- *how will standards of conduct of members of the public be managed?*

Quoracy

The quorum for the meeting shall be [insert level] or [insert number] members, whichever is the smaller. Typical levels are one quarter or one third.

Chair

For the first few meetings the forum will have a temporary chair to get things moving. But it will need to decide on its arrangements for appointing a chair and these will need to be set out in the constitution. This will need to say how the chair will be appointed and for how long .

Other office bearers

The forum might choose to have other 'office bearers' for example a deputy to stand in in the absence of the chair, and a secretary.

Access

One of the key tasks of the forum is to promote inclusion in decision making at a local level. Part of this will mean making meetings and events as accessible as possible. As a minimum, arrangements for meetings will need to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act by making reasonable adjustments to the arrangements to cater for the needs of disabled people. But forums may well want to go further than this by taking further steps to make meetings and events not only accessible but also as attractive and relevant to disabled people as possible. Guidelines on access for meetings and events are available from the Policy and Performance Team in the Chief Executive's Office.

Language and accessible information

The constitution should specify what the arrangements are for the publication of the agenda, how to get things on the agenda, and how the decisions and debates and wider information about the forum will be published.

All information from the forum should be attractive and friendly, be written in plain language and accessible. It should also meet the needs of people for whom written English may be difficult, the needs of people with visual or hearing impairments, people who are housebound, and people who do not have access to the internet. The forum should also consider how to involve and communicate with people with learning difficulties.

FINANCE

The forum will advise the Neighbourhood Coordinator on spending a budget of £50,000 year. The Neighbourhood Manager is responsible for this budget, and all expenditure against it is subject to the City Council's Finance Procedure rules, and any other instructions that may be issued from time to time.

The forum should consider the following issues, and may wish to note the resulting arrangements in its constitution:

- *how it wishes to conduct its meetings in order to arrive at its spending recommendations and priorities*
- *the format and frequency of expenditure monitoring reports*
- *its procedures for raising any additional funding from other sources*
- *its criteria for the issue of any one-off grants to voluntary organisations (noting that recurrent grant funding of any voluntary organisation from forum money is prohibited)*

CONSTITUTION - ADOPTION AND ALTERNATION

The constitution will need to say what process will be used for the adoption of the constitution and for any future alternations to it. An example might be that it is circulated three weeks in advance of an annual meeting and adopted by at least two thirds of the membership.

TERMINATION

The constitution will need to say what process will be used for the termination of the forum.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Members of the forum will abide by a code of conduct by signing a declaration on becoming a member of the forum.

The code of conduct of the forum is based on three sets of principles:

- *Principles of Conduct in Public Life (from work of the Nolan Commission on Standards of Conduct in Public Life)*
- *the principle that members of the forum seek to promote equality and tackle discrimination;*
- *and an agreement to behave in an acceptable and positive manner whilst on forum business*

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS OF [name of forum]

Selflessness I will serve the interest of the public and not show advantage or disadvantage to any person.

Honesty and Integrity I will not place myself in situations where my honesty and integrity may be questioned and I will not behave improperly.

Objectivity I will make decisions based on what is considered to be in the best interests of improving the quality of life of local people.

Openness I will be as open as possible about my actions and should be prepared to give reasons for those actions.

Personal Judgement I will take account of the views of others and will always act in the best interest of local people.

Respect for Others I will not discriminate unlawfully against any person, and I will treat people with respect, regardless of their race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation or disability.

Promoting Equality I will work to promote equality of all people and to tackle discrimination against people, particularly those who experience disadvantage, for example on the grounds of race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation or disability.

Effective Behaviour I will behave positively. I will be open and honest and respect other people's contributions. I will work with others in the forum to develop openness and trust and to learn from each other and from experience. I will accept that some conflict is a necessary part of making decisions, but I will not seek to create or exacerbate conflict where it is oppressive to others, and is not in the best interests of the work of the forum as a whole.

I, _____ [name of person], agree to abide by this Code of Conduct whilst a member of _____ [name of forum]

Signed _____ Date _____

This constitution for [name of forum] was agreed on _____ date

Signed _____ Chair