

DRAFT

OPERATING

PROTOCOLS

FOR

AREA FORUMS

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These protocols, agreed by council, are not intended to cover all eventualities and should not be seen as rigid and inflexible, but rather as a guide to the operational process of area forums.

1. Role of the Area Forum

The purpose of the area forum is to provide an open opportunity in which to discuss local concerns and issues, prioritise areas for action and produce a local area forum plan that will feed into the wider Sustainable Community Strategy, prepared by the Local Strategic Partnership. It will also provide an opportunity for the council and its partners to consult and receive feedback, not only on policies and services, but also on wider issues of local concern such as the environment and community safety.

- (a) Each forum will:
 - (i) Elect its own Chair and Vice Chair from amongst the ward members on the Forum. Where an area forums members are from one political party it is suggested that the Chair is rotated on a yearly basis, with opportunities extended to community representatives to co-chair. Where area forum members are from more than one political party, it is suggested that the Chair is rotated at each meeting again inviting community representatives to co-chair.
 - (ii) Hold a formal meeting of the forum no more than three times a year to be scheduled annually at the beginning of the Council municipal year. Matters arising outside of this schedule should be facilitated by the relevant departments or agencies.
 - (iii) Develop an area plan. The purpose of the plan is to provide a range of useful information about the area forum, and to identify local issues and priorities to support and guide the area forum in working towards addressing these throughout the year. The plan is a document that will evolve over time and will be reviewed and updated regularly as new issues and priorities emerge to ensure that it is a responsive planning document.

2. Chair and Ward Members of Area Forum

- (b) **The Chair of the Area Forum will be responsible for –**
- (i) overseeing the development and monitoring of the local area forum plan agreed by the forum and the agenda for the meetings;
 - (ii) ensuring the meeting is conducted in a manner that is –
 - (a) inclusive, providing an opportunity for the relevant parties to participate; and
 - (b) ensuring elected and advisory members, community representatives, officers and members of the public are treated with courtesy, respect and objectivity; and
 - (c) keeping meetings to order, giving all participants at area forums time to get involved and making sure they finish on time. (see appendix A)
 - (iii) overseeing the effective operation of the public question time session;
 - (iv) attend regular Chairs meetings with other area forum chairs and the Executive Member for Community and Customer Engagement to discuss and share best practice in relation to the operation and development of the area forums across Wirral.
- (d) **The role of the area forum elected members is to:**
- (i) Work with colleagues to fulfil the function of the forum
 - (ii) Engage local people, (by establishing appropriate and sustainable consultation mechanisms) collecting their views on issues and priorities and feeding this back to the Council through the community planning process;
 - (iii) Take an active part in all meetings and the on-going development of the area forum;
 - (iv) Advise the Chief Officer of area forum of matters arising within the ward and;

- (v) Work closely with the area co-ordinator, community groups, area forum representatives and other agencies operating within their ward

3. Chief Officer, Area Co-ordinator and officers role on the Area Forums

(a) Chief Officer

Chief Officers will be required to –

- (i) Oversee the general performance of the area forum for which they are responsible;
- (ii) Ensure relevant officers are in attendance at area forums when required.
- (iii) Assist in the development and progression of the local area plan for the forum;
- (iv) Provide back office support to the area forum as and when required.

(b) Area Co-ordinator

Area co-ordinators will be required to –

- (i) Work directly to the designated chief officer, keeping them, and other directors, informed of relevant issues ;
- (ii) Work directly with all elected members of the area forum;
- (iii) Take the lead role in ensuring the effectiveness of the area forum through securing relevant action is followed up and requests from the area forum reported upon;(this will be developed through Customer Relationship Management Systems.)
- (iv) Act as the appropriate point of contact for all advisory and community representatives on the area forum;
- (v) Organise and support specific subgroups established by the area forum;
- (vi) Assist in the engagement of the local community and other community organisations across the ward groupings covered by the area forum;

- (vii) Produce an area co-ordinators report for each forum meeting, highlighting the key issues and progress made;
- (viii) Attend various events throughout Wirral to promote area forums and community engagement.

(c) **Officers of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council**

All officers of the council are required, as part of their day to day duties, to assist in the development and progression of the community planning framework adopted on Wirral through –

- (i) Attending area forum meetings as requested or ensure an appropriate replacement is present if unavailable;
- (ii) Attending and / or leading subgroup meetings established by the area forums which relate to your area of work and on which you can offer a valuable source of advice and information in finding local solutions;
- (iii) Produce reports and briefing notes for area co-ordinators to feed into the area co-ordinators reports.
- (iv) Promote the role, remit and resources of the area forums both internally and externally, to ensure the community planning framework is viewed as a place where important key decisions and discussions are taken

4. The role of the Community Engagement Team

The Community Engagement Team, will, amongst other duties:

- (a) Provide a full secretariat role to the area forums including the despatch of agendas and associated papers;
- (b) Advise on procedural and other practical arrangements in relation to the area forum;
- (c) Ensure appropriate publicity is given to the area forum;
- (d) Develop partnership building between the Council, other organisations and local people
- (e) Arrange regular training and development sessions for all those involved in delivering the aims of the area forum
- (f) With members, develop a programme of continuous improvement and development for all area forums .through an annual improvement plan

5. Community and Advisory Members

- (a) Community and Advisory members of the area forum will operate under the same ethical framework as the elected members and will conduct themselves accordingly;
- (b) Community and Advisory Members will be required to:
 - (i) attend all meetings of the area forum;
 - (ii) take a full and active part in discussions and;
 - (iii) represent the views of their community / organisation and feedback all relevant information and decisions taken by the area forum. (refer to Appendix B for further details of the proposed Code of Conduct for all Advisory and Community representatives)
- (c) Community and Advisory members will be given the opportunity to raise issues on the agenda having notified the Chair and Secretariat prior to the agenda being dispatched;
- (d) All Community and Advisory representatives serving on an area forum will, upon completion of a 3 year term be required to signal their intention to continue in their present position and, in the case of community representatives, be judged against new expression of interest forms received during their tenure before continuing in their current capacity

6. Members of the Public

The following guidelines will apply to the participation of members of the public at forum meetings:

- (a) Members of the public are to be given every opportunity to attend and participate in the area forums;
- (b) A time limited (no more than half an hour) public question time will appear on all area forum agendas, during which time members of the public will be able to raise specific issues and r ask questions of members of the forum;
- (c) Members of the public are also reminded that the aim of the forum is to produce an annual local area plan, and as such, questions should be confined to the business of the forum and not be of an individual nature;

- (d) All area forum meetings will be widely publicised and members of the public are requested, wherever possible, to table questions for the forum at least 48 hours prior to the meeting;
- (e) If questions are not dealt with at the meeting, or to the satisfaction of the member of the public, then a written response from the appropriate council department will be forthcoming within two weeks of the meeting taking place;
- (f) Members of the public are required to respect the rights of others who are present at the meeting, treating everyone with courtesy and respect. (see Appendix A)

7. Venue and Layout

The following guidelines should be taken into account when arranging meetings of the area forum: -

- (a) Venue
All venues and facilities should be physically accessible.
- (b) Transport and car parking
All venues should offer adequate car parking, close to an accessible entrance and provide clear directions to the forum meeting. If required, transport to and from the venue can be arranged if adequate notice (48 hours minimum) is provided to the community engagement team.
- (c) Printed Information
All reports and published information should follow the 'clear print' guidelines (at least 12-point size), with large print, tape and Braille and translated copies available upon request
- (d) Facilities
As a matter of course the following should be available at all meetings of the area forum:
 - (i) An induction loop which can also be linked to a sound system for larger venues;
 - (ii) Time during the meeting for those with communication difficulties to 'have their say';
 - (iii) Sign language interpreters (available upon request);
 - (iv) Spaces distributed evenly throughout the room for wheelchair users.

8. Presentations Consultation and Reports to Area Forums

One ten minute presentation every area form meeting. This allows for some flexibility to accommodate necessary and sometime last minute agenda items.

Reports supporting presentations should follow the same format.

9. Area Forum Funding

Each area forum has been awarded £11,000 from the Community Initiatives Fund for projects designed to meet the needs of local people. Basic criteria, funding limits and priorities are set by each of the Area Forums.

£3,000 from the Community Safety Fund for Community Safety projects (up to a maximum of £2,500 per project) aimed at dealing with the Community Safety Strategy Objectives.

£1,500 from the Local Agenda 21 Fund for Environmental projects (up to a maximum of £500 per project).

The process area forums must follow for the allocation of funds is as follows:

- (a) A meeting of the **full** area forum (annually) to agree:
 - (i) how the funds are to be allocated i.e. are there to be any specific criteria attached which relates to the priorities identified for the forum;
 - (ii) the assessment panel should consist of no more than six advisory/community representatives and ward councillors They will be responsible, on behalf of the forum, for assessing all bids received;
 - (iii) when the fund is to be advertised and how this will be undertaken looking specifically to see if there are to be a number of funding rounds each with a set amount of funding available or if there is to be a rolling programme of advertisements until all funds are allocated; (see appendix C)
 - (iv) the assessment panel will feedback their recommendations on the bids received, to the area co-ordinator who will pass them onto the Community Engagement Officer to include in a report that is sent to Executive Board

- (v) the area co-ordinator for each area forum will be required to inform the community engagement team of:
 - (i) the preferred CIF process to be adopted by the area forum;
 - (ii) any specific criteria to be attached to the funds;
 - (iii) the members of the assessment panel;
 - (iv) when and how the forum wish the fund to be advertised;
 - (v) the date and venue of the assessment panel so that a member of the team and / or the voluntary sector liaison officer can be available;
- (b) The community engagement team will place an advertisement in the Wirral Globe, with a 8 week deadline date for the return of completed applications, and will distribute additional copies of this advert to all council information points (libraries, one stop shops etc.) to ensure that the wider community are given every opportunity to apply for the fund;
- (c) Community engagement team to provide a full administration function in relation to the grants, such as distributing application packs as requested and producing a summary of all grants received to assist the assessment panel
- (d) Community engagement team to send photocopies of all bids received to members of the assessment panel at least 7 days prior to the date set for the assessment meeting
- (e) All bids are date stamped upon receipt at the offices of the Community Engagement Team and any bid which arrives after the date for completion be sent to all members of the assessment panel clearly marked as a late bid, which will then be at the discretion of the assessment panel as to whether it is included in the assessment process – guidelines would suggest that this decision could be made on the basis of over or under-subscription to the funds;
- (f) At the assessment panel meeting members must declare any conflict of interest, taking no further part in any discussions on the bid in question;
- (g) The area co-ordinator will be responsible for taking notes of which bids were successful and unsuccessful taking into consideration any comments made by the panel. All details will then be passed to the Community Engagement Assistant as soon after the meeting as possible but no later than 1 week after the meeting has taken place.

- (h) If a further meeting of the assessment panel is required as the panel feel that they need additional information before reaching a decision, then again, the area co-ordinator must inform the community engagement team of the date and venue of the meeting;
- (i) The community engagement team will
 - (ii) prepare letters requesting additional information from applicants on the points raised by the assessment panel with a predetermined deadline (10 working days) for clarification;
 - (iii) if a further meeting of the assessment panel is required, the community engagement team will ensure that all additional information is sent to all members of the assessment panel at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.
 - (j) When the funding has been agreed by the assessment panel, the community engagement team will begin the process of ordering cheques for all successful applicants and drafting letters informing all successful applicants of how and when they can collect their cheques, and unsuccessful applicants, as to the reasons why their bid did not succeed on this occasion;
- (k) Assessment panel may reconvene to decide upon the monitoring arrangements for each bid which could include:
 - (i) arranging to visit the organisation to view the project / impact of the funding;
 - (ii) inviting the organisation to attend a meeting of the area forum to further discuss how the fund has benefited the organisation and local community;
 - (iii) requesting that any monies not spent within 12 months by an organisation that they be returned or that the panel consider giving more time to spend the monies taking into consideration any special circumstances
- (l) Area co-ordinator to inform the community engagement team of any proposed monitoring arrangements for each successful bid.

Appendix A

Code of Conduct for Area Forum Meetings.

Indicate to the Chairperson when you would like to speak

Let invited speakers finish what they have to say

Respect others right to be heard

Do not use abusive or offensive language

Do not make any discriminatory remarks

Do not have private conversations while meeting is in progress

Stick to Agenda

COMMUNITY AND ADVISORY REPRESENTATIVES ON AREA FORUMS

CODE OF CONDUCT

1. Community and Advisory representatives are required to conduct themselves according to Wirral Councils Members' code of conduct
2. All Community and Advisory representatives will be expected to sign a formal undertaking (copy attached), applicable to external representatives, before commencing their role
3. Broadly speaking, Community and Advisory Representatives should conduct themselves in a manner that promotes and maintains the integrity of Wirral Council and the area forum served; its standing in the community, and with other bodies to which the Council and area forum have links. Representatives will also be expected to conduct themselves in a manner that promotes equality; treating people with respect, regardless of their race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability.

APPENDIX B

UNDERTAKING OF COMMUNITY AND ADVISORY REPRESENTATIVES

Serving as an independent community / advisory representative on an Area Forum: -

I agree: -

- (a) to observe and conduct myself in accordance with the policies and procedures of Wirral Borough Council
- (b) To conduct myself according to Wirral Borough Councils Members' code of conduct
- (c) to make every effort to attend all meetings of the forum;
- (d) to give adequate notice to the appropriate area co-ordinator if I am unable to attend any of the area forum meetings;
- (e) that if absent from three consecutive meetings I may be removed from my position, if the remaining voting members (ward councillors) of the forum are in agreement
- (f) to feed relevant and timely information to and from the forum and the community / organisation(s) I represent by giving an update at each area forum meeting on what has been happening within my community/organisation(s)
- (g) to respect the nature of any confidential information and to take every possible and reasonable step to safeguard and safely dispose of such information (area co-ordinators can assist in regard to the safe disposal of confidential information);
- (h) to act impartially at all times and declare any personal or private interests that may be related to the activities of the forum;
- (i) to give, wherever possible, at least one month's notice if I wish to resign my membership of the forum;
- (j) to hold the post of Community / Advisory representative for a 3 year period, after which time, I will have the option of reapplying for the position with other interested parties or standing down;
- (k) to undertake training and development activities as and when required, that may assist in fulfilling my role on the forum; (at least one per year)
- (l) to attend any additional working groups established by the forum, as appropriate, to further support and develop the work of the forum

- (m) to agree, as a general principle, to refrain from making public comments about the work and deliberations of the forum, choosing instead to liaise with the designated press officer for that forum.

Area Forum:	Dated:
Signed:	Print signature:

Appendix C

FORUM FUNDING TIMETABLE

