

Cabinet
26 September 2008
12. REVIEW OF HIGHWAYS PARTNERSHIP FORUMS
Recommendation

1. **The Director of Environmental Services recommends that:**
 - (a) **having regard to the recent consultation with community partners, the Highways Partnership Forums be reorganised so as to retain a Forum for each District area and membership of each Forum to comprise all County Councillors for Divisions within that area;**
 - (b) **each District Council be invited to nominate up to two non-voting representatives to attend Forum meetings for that District area; and**
 - (c) **he be authorised to finalise the detailed arrangements for the operation of the Forums, including terms of reference and operating procedures, in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment.**

Background Information

2. Currently, each Forum comprises three County Council members and three District Council members, with other members able to attend, but not participate in any voting that may take place. The Forum meetings have operated differently in each District area.

3. At its meeting on 8 February 2008, the Cabinet approved a consultation with community partners regarding the future operation of the Highways Partnership Forums, for the reasons set out in the report to that meeting.

Purpose of Forums

4. The Highways Forums will provide members with an opportunity to receive reports from officers regarding all relevant highway issues in each District. This will typically include a maintenance programme and a progress report on outstanding traffic management schemes and Orders. Officers will also report on significant development control matters and major improvement schemes for the area. Members will have the opportunity to raise matters with officers and advise of priorities and key concerns.

Consultation

5. All 57 County Councillors were consulted over this proposal. 23 individual replies were received, together with a response from the Labour Group Leader on behalf of his

Group.

6. All six District Councils were consulted.

7. Formal replies were received from Worcester City Council and Wychavon District Council, and a response from the members of Redditch Highways Partnership Forum. Individual responses were also received from three Wychavon District Councillors, one Wyre Forest District Councillor and two Bromsgrove District Councillors.

Analysis of Consultation

8. The overwhelming view from County Councillors was that they wanted to see a local member panel comprising all of the County Councillors from each Division in the District. Many expressed concern that District Councillors were raising issues within their Division of which they were unaware. Most members did say, however, that the views of District Councillors were important and that there should be a means of these being raised at meetings. Most County Councillors did not, however, want District Councillors to have voting rights.

9. Redditch HPU Forum wanted the Forum to remain in its current format, fully including District Councillors, and this view was shared by three County Councillors. Other Councillors wanted to see the meetings held in the evenings with a slot for public participation.

10. The District Councillors responding individually wished either to retain the current involvement of District Councillors, expand this, and/or include Parish Councils. They pointed out that members of the public do not generally distinguish between tiers of authority and tend to raise highway issues directly with elected members irrespective of them being County or District.

11. Wychavon District Council welcomed the consultation and responded that the existing Forum in Wychavon works well. They wished to see clarity over the objectives of the review and future purpose of the Forums as a pre-cursor to the review. Essentially they felt that the composition of the Forum would be dependent on first resolving its principal roles and responsibilities. They also wanted Parish Councils to be consulted, expressed concern that there would be opportunities to raise District issues, and raised the question of an opportunity to create a more meaningful and structured platform for highway issues for the public and the PACT process.

12. Worcester City Council wanted the review to take an opportunity to create a local Forum addressing wider issues such as producing a seamless street scene service, land drainage and community safety. They also understood the desire for the Forum being composed of all County

Proposal

Councillors including a mechanism for District Councillors to represent local views.

13. It is proposed that there be a Highways Forum for each District area and membership of each Forum to comprise all County Councillors for Divisions within that District area.

14. It is further proposed that District Councils should be invited to nominate up to 2 non-voting representatives who would attend the meetings and hold a mandate for street scene and land drainage issues. This will enable items to be raised in a more focused and structured way, rather than at the present where several District Councillors attend the meetings, and bring forward many items.

15. It should be noted that District Councils should not only be able to raise issues but also to take issues away, operating in a two-way exchange of information. In this way County officers and members may make requests of District Councils and receive a more formal response.

16. The meetings should:

- be businesslike
- be non-adversarial
- identify specific roles and responsibilities, and
- have the active involvement of all members.

17. The timing of meetings may be determined locally by each Forum and frequency of meetings is proposed to be quarterly. Secretariat support will be provided by the County Council. A County Councillor will be elected Chairman of the Forum, replacing the current system of the Chair alternating between District and County Councils.

18. The facility for public participation is already there in the current format and it is recommended that whether this is permitted should also be a local decision for each Forum.

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

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Specific Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Environmental Services) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this item:

Agenda Item No. 5

Agenda and Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 8
February 2008

Consultation documents and responses

Page No.

Cabinet – 26 September 2008

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