

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**CABINET**  
**21<sup>st</sup> July 2009**

**Proposal to Launch Wyre Forest Community Forums**

<b>OPEN</b>	
<b>SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME</b>	
<b>CORPORATE PLAN AIM</b>	A well run and responsive Council
<b>CABINET MEMBER</b>	Cllr Marcus Hart
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Director of Community & Partnership Services
<b>CONTACT OFFICER</b>	Jane Doyle x 2745
<b>APPENDICES</b>	None

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 To propose the launch of a series of Wyre Forest Community Forums.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**2.1 The Cabinet is asked to RECOMMEND to Council that:**

The Council takes forward the proposal to launch Wyre Forest Community Forums.

**3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 The Council, alongside key strategic partners, is committed to involving the community in decision making and shaping the delivery of services.

3.2 According to Connecting with Communities: 'The Business Case for Communications' produced by I&DeA (the improvement and development agency for Community and Local Government), more effective two-way communication with the public is needed to build trust in local government.

3.3 According to the recently reported results of the statutory Government satisfaction ratings, 'The Place Survey', Wyre Forest residents want to be more involved in decision making rather than letting others do it for them. Nine out of ten respondents said that they would like to be more involved in the decisions that affect their local area.

3.4 Wyre Forest Community Forums are proposed as a further opportunity to engage with residents. Conducted in a BBC 'Question Time' format, pre-selected questions from the floor would be addressed to senior representatives from the Council and key strategic partners such as the Police, Primary Care Trust and the Community Housing Group.

3.5 The Wyre Forest Community Forum would comprise a series of early evening events across the district. The events would be branded under Wyre Forest Matters, the

local strategic partnership that brings key strategic partners together to deliver the actions within the Sustainable Community Strategy “Making a Real Difference”.

3.6 The objectives of the Wyre Forest Community Forum are as follows:

- a) Promote participation in proposals and decisions that will shape delivery of community services in Wyre Forest
- b) Provide local equality of opportunity to have a voice on community issues
- c) Give consideration and the ability to take action on matters of local concern
- d) Encourage a shared sense of place and belonging

3.7 Holding Community Forums would provide the opportunity to:

- a) Connect high level representatives from key partner organisations with local people
- b) Develop the community empowerment agenda throughout Wyre Forest
- c) Demonstrate community leadership through collaboration

3.8 These objectives directly reflect the Council’s communications pledges for 2009/10. These are:

- i) Members and employees will be informed and involved with the transformation and restructuring programme – FORWARD TOGETHER.
- ii) The Council’s reputation in the media and the community will be pro-actively managed
- iii) Communities will have a voice and there will be meaningful opportunities for participation in the Council’s decision making
- iv) The Council will promote a strong commitment to equality and diversity and promote safe, cohesive communities
- v) Raise the profile of the District

3.9 The Community Forum Panel would be made up of senior representatives from Wyre Forest service providers. This will include members of the Council and the Local Strategic Partnership, Wyre Forest Matters, including and representatives from the health, policing and education sectors.

3.10 Typically a Community Forum panel may include the Chief Executive from Wyre Forest District Council or his nominated Director, the Leader of the Council or his nominated Cabinet Member, two representatives from the District Local Strategic Partnership and a senior non administration Councillor, likely to be the Leader of the Opposition or a Chairman from Scrutiny Committees. A prominent leader from the local business community will also be invited as a panel member.

3.11 The Community Forum events would be organised by Wyre Forest District Council’s Communications Team alongside the Partnership Manager of Wyre Forest Matters.

**4. PROGRESS**

- 4.1 In April 2009, an initial meeting took place between the Media & Marketing Officer and Cllr John Campion and Cllr Nathan Desmond. At this meeting the principle of the Forums was discussed and it was agreed that the idea should be proposed to Cabinet and Full Council, then to the Wyre Forest Matters Board for approval. In May 2009, Cllr Marcus Hart became Cabinet Member for Community & Partnership Services and was briefed on the Community Forums initiative by the Director of Community and Partnership Services in June 2009.
- 4.2 Proposed format of a Community Forum event
- Audience arrives at 6.15pm. The event will start at 7.15pm until 8.30pm and will be chaired by an independent member of the community
  - Light refreshments will be provided
  - Pre-forum session - on arrival, audience asked to complete a question slip which will then be considered by council officers in a separate room. Five questions will be chosen to be posed to the panel. The questioner will be advised that their question has been chosen before the forum gets underway at 7.15pm.
  - Questions to the panel session – the panel will address pre-advised questions from community members in the audience in a BBC TV Question Time format.
  - Residents and community groups may also submit questions for consideration at Community Forum events by emailing the Council on the central e-mail address [worcestershirehub@wyreforestdc.gov.uk](mailto:worcestershirehub@wyreforestdc.gov.uk) or by writing to Wyre Forest Customer Service Centre, Kidderminster Town Hall, Vicar Street, Kidderminster DY10 1DB or by telephoning the Customer Service Centre on 01562 732928
- 4.3 The Community Forum will not be the place for discussing planning applications or local licensing applications or reporting anti social behaviour issues. There are already well-defined public consultation and appeal procedures in place for these matters.
- 4.4 Following the Community Forum event, all residents who have submitted a question or comment will receive a written response within 10 workings days.
- 4.5 A short “you said, we did” report will be produced for Wyre Forest District Council’s Cabinet and for Wyre Forest Matters Forum. This will include an action monitoring sheet showing the status of issues/items raised at the forum. This information will be available on the District Council and Wyre Forest matters web sites.
- 4.6 Proposed timetable for launching Wyre Forest Community Forum:

Wyre Forest District Cabinet for approval	July 2009
Wyre Forest District Full Council for approval	July 2009
Wyre Forest Matters Board agenda for approval	Sept 2009
Planning, organising, marketing	Oct, Nov 2009
Kidderminster Wyre Forest Community Forum	late Nov 2009
Stourport-on-Severn Wyre Forest Community	Feb 2010
Bewdley Wyre Forest Community Forum	May 2010

**5. NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 If this proposal is approved, the Council's Communications Team would progress this initiative according to the timing plan in 4.7 above.

**6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 It is anticipated that associated costs would be in the region of £1000 which would be met within the corporate communications budget. Costs may include venue hire, advertising, catering arrangements and hire of roving microphone, audience consultation technology.
- 6.2 There is a resource implication in this proposal as a number of council officers would be required to facilitate each forum event.

**7. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Local community forums would meet the objectives of the new 'duty to promote democracy' by making councillors and leaders in local service provision accessible to the public. Equally, our 'duty to involve' obligations will be met by listening to the views of local people and feeding back responses to their questions.
- 7.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and all requirements are met within this proposal.

**8. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 8.1 The Council identified a potential conflict between the increased pressure to involve people in influencing decisions and the need for clear, useful outcomes as a result of the duty to involve. The setting up of a community forum model is an appropriate and measured response to mitigating any risk associated with this and provides a mechanism for involvement to ensure that people can be involved in and influence decisions.

**9. CONCLUSION**

- 9.1 The Community Forums support the Council and the District's key strategic partners' objective of "duty to involve" the Community in shaping service provision in Wyre Forest.

**10. CONSULTEES**

- Cabinet Member Community & Partnership Services
- Leader of the Council