

Kent County Council

Report to: Mr Paul Carter, Leader and Cabinet member for Localism

Date: October 2008

Reporting officer: Will Farmer, Community Liaison Manager (Gravesham)

Subject: Development of Neighbourhood Forums for Gravesham

Purpose and summary of report:

To seek approval to develop Joint Neighbourhood Forums for Gravesham for a one year pilot period

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Since late 2006, KCC and Dover District Council have been piloting a new way of localising the various agendas that come from and concern the communities in that area. As part of the Localism agenda both authorities decided to work together with Parish and Town Councils to improve contacts with, and response to, the public who use their services, the outcome of these aspirations has led to the formation of a number of joint neighbourhood forums (5) in the Dover area.
- 1.2 The proposal for Gravesham is to mirror the arrangements piloted in Dover which will be modified for Gravesham resulting in the creation of three Neighbourhood Forums which will be trialled across the borough: east, west and rural. The current proposals should allow each council to make progress within a neighbourhood structure which will be inclusive and responsive to respective council executives, and take responsibility for passing local needs and priorities to service providers and decision-makers in each council
- 1.3 In discussions with Gravesham Borough Council, it was felt that the governance arrangements in place in Dover would be mirrored in Gravesham, with some minor modification, in particular clarifications made to the process of selection of Chair and Vice Chairmen.
- 1.4 Also the Draft Vision Statement (appendix 1) sets out how both councils wish to improve the style and outcomes of the Gravesham Local Board, to develop and strengthen the LSP.

2. THE PROGRAMME

- 2.1 A time table is proposed (appendix 4) which will set up three Neighbourhood Forums. These will connect the tiers of local government and give local people greater power to influence their services through inputs to local groups of elected councillors in Neighbourhood Forums as well as bring forward proposals for funding of local projects.

- 2.2 One of the key aims is to create neighbourhood forums which provide Member input to deliver key strategic and local elements of Gravesham's local chapter of the Dartford and Gravesham Sustainable Community Strategy and KCC's Towards 2010 strategy.
- 2.3 The Gravesham Neighbourhood Forums will be semi-autonomous with the membership comprising of Gravesham County Councillors and District Ward Members as well as representatives from Parish Councils and local organisations, at this level there will also be consultation input to decision-making within KCC and GBC. Each Neighbourhood Forum will still be advisory to the respective councils with the ability to make recommendations on grant funding for local projects
- 2.4 The Governance arrangements and procedural rules for the Dover Neighbourhood forum model appears to provide an appropriate balance between "due process" and flexibility; and are being adapted for the Gravesham Neighbourhood Forum (See appendix 2 and 3).
- 2.5 Quarterly meetings of the current Gravesham Local Board will be suspended for the period of the pilot and will be replaced by the Neighbourhood Forums.
- 2.6 Introduction of new arrangements need to be timed to meet the requirements of all sectors of membership. The first Neighbourhood Forums will meet during November 2008.
- 2.7 The Dartford and Gravesham LSP Board will review the progress of the Forums and agree arrangements and timescales with the partners represented on the LSP on how to take forward the various items raised as a result of the engagement through the Forum.

3. FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Experience with the Dover Neighbourhood Forum model has shown that it is essential that the correct level of resourcing from both authorities is in place, to ensure smooth running of the partnership arrangement. It is proposed that there will be a single, full time Community Liaison Manager devoted to Gravesham (employed by Kent) from September 2008. The CLM for Gravesham will work with dedicated GBC Democratic Services staff to set up and run the Neighbourhood Forums for the pilot period (1 year). These resources are met within current budgets.
- 3.2 It is proposed that from financial year 2009-10, that Gravesham Borough Council will consider match funding Kent County Council capital grant schemes funding, adding to the grant money currently available.
- 3.3 It is proposed that a similar arrangement that has been set up in Dover will be established to manage the joint grant funding arrangements. The grant money would be divided between the forums based on population, with recommendations on spend being made by the three Neighbourhood Forums. In line with each of the Council's Constitution, a report would have to be prepared to KCC Cabinet member and Gravesham Borough Council cabinet for final authorisation of the spend.

4. Recommendations:

That authority be given to;

1. Suspend the current Kent Gravesham Local Board arrangements from October 2008 for a one year period to pilot joint Neighbourhood Forums, similar to the Dover model in Gravesham
2. Create three joint neighbourhood forums in Gravesham borough - Gravesham East, Northfleet/Gravesham West and Gravesham Rural.
3. That the pilot scheme be reviewed in September 2009

5. ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTS

Appendices

1. Vision Statement / roles and responsibilities;
2. Governance/financial arrangements
3. Procedure rules
4. Project time scale

Appendix 1

Gravesham Neighbourhood Forums

Vision statement

1. AIMS

To help create a partnership for the Borough where everyone feels they belong, knows how and where to make their voice heard, make a difference and create cohesive, active and sustainable communities.

To enable locally elected representatives, as leaders of their communities, to engage with and respond to local communities needs.

To create opportunities for residents to gain a greater voice and influence over local services, to improve the quality of their lives, their neighbourhoods and the Borough.

- 1.1 To link directly with other existing community engagement groups to improve communication and to reduce duplication and the chances of consultation fatigue;
- 1.2 To link with the Local Strategic Partnership, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and Kent Thameside initiatives;
- 1.3 To innovate and find new ways to enhance the engagement and involvement of the seldom heard groups;
- 1.4 To provide a channel of communication between residents, elected representatives and officers from the three tiers of local government and other organisations delivering services to the local communities; to inform and to be informed;
- 1.5 To promote and develop elected members as representatives and leaders of the local community;
- 1.6 To provide an opportunity for local people and communities to influence the decisions and all local services and issues which affect them and their neighbourhoods;
- 1.7 To empower residents and community groups to act to improve the quality of life, their neighbourhoods, the Borough and the County;
- 1.8 To make recommendations for the allocation of the Small Community Capital Grant Scheme to community projects that will benefit local residents and the wider local community;
- 1.9 To develop and promote joint initiatives between Kent County, Borough, Parish Councils and the Community and Voluntary Sector in Gravesham.

2. VALUES AND QUALITY EXPECTATIONS OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS (NF)

- 2.1 The NF's will provide an opportunity for genuine dialogue and open discussion, enabling and encourage an informal, participatory and innovative approach to community engagement;
- 2.2 Feedback on outcomes and actions resulting from NF meetings should be promoted and communicated to all participants;
- 2.3 The format of each meeting will encourage bottom-up decision making and involvement of all members of the community in the running of public meetings;

- 2.4 The meetings will be non-political and represent all the residents in Gravesham Borough;
- 2.5 The NF's will deliver tangible outcomes and benefits for residents and for the community;
- 2.6 Wherever possible, practical and lawful, each Council represented will not withhold from discussion among members of the NF, matters of service delivery or local concern that are of genuine public interest;
- 2.7 As elected representatives of the community, members of County, Borough and Parish will have the primary role of leading the NF and taking delegated decisions/recommendations to their appropriate Cabinets on behalf of the community;
- 2.8 To run efficient and accountable decision making processes for the grants that take into account the aspirations of the community in the decisions.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Kent County and Gravesham Borough Councils

- Members and Officers will work together in a partnership that recognises parity of esteem between all councils/tiers of local government, to seek the very best for the communities and residents of Gravesham within the vision, aims and terms of reference of the NF's;
- To commit resources as necessary to run successful NF's, either officer time, financial or in-kind support;
- To encourage Parish and voluntary/community sector participation wherever possible;
- To agree targets for the NF's for example on public attendance and actions arising from the meetings.

4. PARISH COUNCILS

- To work with County and Borough for the benefit of the local community;
- To agree representatives who will have voting authority, on behalf of each Parish Council at the NF;
- To commit financial or in-kind support or other resources for the successful running of the NF, wherever possible.

3. VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

- To agree to work together through the NF's, with local residents and all tiers of local government, for the benefit of the local community.

4. ALL ELECTED MEMBERS – COUNTY, DISTRICT, PARISH

- Through the NF's, to ensure they seek out and listen to the needs, voices and aspirations of local people and communities that they serve;
- To do all they can within the terms of reference of the NF's to meet those needs and aspirations;
- To support citizens to engage with and take advantage of the opportunities for community betterment the NF's offer;
- To empower local communities to improve the places in which they live;
- To not bring party politics or rivalry between elected members or tiers of local government into the public meeting;

- To ensure the success of the NF's, including delivering outcomes for local communities and improvements in services.

5. NOMINATED REPRESENTATIVES FROM COUNTY/DISTRICT/PARISH ON EACH FORUM

- To encourage civic participation and involvement at the NF's;
- To be the Champion for the respective Council or NF area;
- To work together in partnership to overcome any issues that may arise;
- To ensure NF are run in line with the Vision Statement; meeting aims and objectives;
- To identify actions where this is not happening;
- To attend all public meetings;
- One representative from each of the three tiers to attend any pre and post meetings, as appropriate;
- To be responsible for agenda recommendations and circulation of all NF papers within own organisation;
- To publicise the NF's, meetings and grant funding availability within their respective NF area;
- To ensure two-way communication between the NF's and their respective organisation;
- To consider funding applications and making recommendations in a timely manner;
- To provide communities with funding application forms;
- To ensure relevant links are made to their own organisations' Corporate Plans.

6. CHAIRMAN/VICE CHAIRMAN

- To be inclusive, promote dialogue and the Vision Statement aims and objectives of the NF's;
- Agree agendas, venues, presenters and format of meetings in consultation with supporting officers and other nominated representatives;
- To ensure the accountability of presenters whilst remaining neutral and suitably supportive;
- To ensure all views are heard at the meetings;
- To ensure a strategic overview at County and Borough level and to act as a conduit with other statutory bodies.

7. OFFICERS – COUNTY AND BOROUGH

- To support citizens to engage with the NF's and take advantage of the opportunities to improve their communities that are provided through the NF's;
- To provide advice to elected members on the running of the NF's;
- To liaise with the Chairman/Vice Chairman to ensure proper and smooth running of the meetings;
- Between the Borough and County officers, to support meetings.

Appendix 2

Gravesham Neighbourhood Forums

Governance arrangements

1. General

- The Gravesham Neighbourhood Forums [NF's] shall be constituted under principles contained within the Local Government Act 2000 [i.e. similar principles to those of the Joint Transportation Boards and will be a non-statutory body];
- The NF's reflect the wishes of the respective Cabinets of Gravesham Borough Council (GBC) and Kent County Council (KCC) to co-operate and work together on local public service issues within their remits;
- The proposal is to create three NF's for Gravesham as a trial for a period of one year and is voluntary on the part of each Council;
- The NF's are accountable in an advisory capacity to KCC's Cabinet for KCC responsibilities and to GBC's Cabinet for GBC responsibilities;
- Each council shall bear its own costs incurred in the operation of the NF's.

2. Membership

- There will be equal voting membership of KCC Gravesham Division Members, and GBC Members and Gravesham Parish Councils (where applicable) on each Neighbourhood Forum (NF).
- Choice of voting representatives (of either borough or county) will be made by each council respectively and reflect the political balance in individual forums.
- Votes will be split as follows;
 - Northfleet/Gravesend West NF -2 District vote/2 County votes
 - Gravesham East NF - 2 District vote/2 County votes
 - Gravesham Rural NF–1 District, 1 County and 1 Parish;
- Co-options are at the discretion of the NF and can be general or for specific meetings; all co-options are non-voting, e.g. representatives of KYCC, Youth Forums, etc.
- The Chairman and Vice Chairman shall be from differing councils, be appointed by respective group leaders and shall rotate as set out below.

With respect to Northfleet/Gravesend West and Gravesham East Forums the Chairman and Vice Chairman arrangements are as follows in table 1:

Table 1

Year	Chairman	Vice Chairman
1	GBC representative	KCC representative
2	KCC representative	GBC representative
3	Repeat cycle from year 1 etc.	

With respect to Gravesham Rural NF where the Parishes are involved, the arrangements are as follows in table 2:

Table 2

Year	Chairman	Vice Chairman
1	KCC representative	Parish representative
2	Parish representative	GBC representative
3	GBC representative	KCC representative
4	Repeat cycle from year 1	

3. Meetings

- Full meetings of the NF's shall be in public. The NF's will generally meet four times during each year at times and venues agreed by the NF members
- There will be no substitutes for representatives under these arrangements
- For voting situations, the quorum shall be as follows.
 - For both Northfleet/Gravesend West and Gravesham East NF's shall be a minimum of one County Council representative and one GBC representative.
 - For the Gravesham Rural NF shall be two representatives from any of the Local authorities involved.
- Procedural Rules for NF's shall apply as set out below in **Appendix 3**
- Copies of all agendas and discussion papers will be sent to NF members at least seven working days before the meeting.
- There will be an opportunity for the public to ask questions at all full meetings of the NF's
- There may also be private meetings for the purposes of agenda planning and briefing of NF members.
- The Access to Information principles shall apply to the NF's as if they were a KCC or GBC committee.
- All Councils will be responsible for publicising the NF meetings and will advertise as widely as possible.

4. Terms of Reference

The NF's will consider matters relating to:

- 1) Provision and performance for services provided on a statutory basis by all councils;
- 2) Services provided by other public bodies, including the Police, Fire and Rescue and Health Authorities where these impact upon local communities;
- 3) Input to, and outputs from, the Local Strategic Partnership;
- 4) The NF's will also be a forum for consultation between the councils and with the public on policies, plans and strategies;
- 5) The NF's may also review performance of services and service providers and, as a consequence, make recommendations in an advisory capacity to the Executive Bodies of the respective councils.

Separate Terms of Reference will be produced for Funding Recommendations for financial year 2009-10

Appendix 3

Gravesham Neighbourhood Forums Procedure Rules

Public involvement

1. The NF's will enable the public to raise oral or written questions on any matters falling within the remit of the NF's. A summary of the questions asked and answers (if appropriate) given will be included in the NF minutes.
2. Meetings will be promoted as widely as possible to encourage involvement of the community in each NF area.

Members' Interests

3. All Members are expected to consider whether they have a personal and/or prejudicial interest in any matter under discussion on the agenda and declare it accordingly at the start of the meeting.

Attendance List

4. Members of the Public will be asked to leave their contact details for future contact regarding meetings.
5. Members attending NF meetings must sign the attendance list or ensure officers record their presence.

Meeting planning

6. The Chairman and Officers will liaise to prepare the agenda for the next meeting and a work programme for future meetings. The NF's may also hold pre-meetings to consider business related to the NF's (e.g. planning agendas, venues, actions) where the public/press are not invited.

Neighbourhood Forum meetings

7. The meetings of the NF's will take place at venues in the local areas, in public, in general four times a year, on dates and at times agreed by each NF.
8. The Community Liaison Manager will invite all voting and non-voting Members to a NF meeting by sending an agenda and accompanying papers to each member's nominated address and normally be sent out at least seven clear working days before the meeting.

Agenda

9. The agenda for each meeting of a NF will normally include:
 - minutes of the previous meeting for approval and signing;
 - reports seeking a decision from the NF [if appropriate];
 - any item which a member of the NF wishes to be included on the agenda, provided it is relevant to the terms of reference and notice has been given to the Community Liaison Manager at least nine working days before the meeting.
 - any item which a Member of any constituent Council, its Cabinet or Cabinet Member wishes to be included on the agenda, provided the prior approval of the Chairman has been given, it is relevant to the terms of reference and notice has been given to the Community Liaison Manager at least nine working days before the meeting.
10. The Chairman may decide that there are special circumstances that justify an item of business, not included on the agenda, being considered as a matter of urgency. The reasons for urgency must be stated at the meeting and the Clerk shall record them in the minutes.

- 11 NF's will normally consider items in the order that they appear on the agenda. The Chairman may vary the order if it is thought appropriate and will explain their reasons to the NF.

Voting

12. If any Member requests, the Chairman will call a vote on any recommendation or a motion or amendment. The vote will be by a show of hands by voting Members of the NF present.
13. If the votes for and against are equal, the Chairman does not have a casting vote and, therefore the recommendation, motion or amendment falls.

Rights to Attend and Speak

14. Members of the public will be encouraged to participate in all facets of the public part of the Forum meetings and will be encouraged to suggest topics for discussion at future meetings.
13. If a member of the public interrupts a meeting or otherwise behaves irregularly, improperly or offensively, the Chairman may request that they leave the room or order that they are removed. In the event of a general disturbance, the Chairman may suspend the meeting or direct that the public be excluded from it. No-one so removed or excluded will be permitted to return to the meeting.
14. Any Member of any constituent Council are encouraged to attend any meeting of the NF's, including those parts of the meeting from which the public and press are excluded. They do not have a right to vote or move a motion or amendment, but may speak on matters with the consent of the Chairman [such consent to be sought before the meeting and should not normally be withheld).

Attendance of officers at meetings

15. Cabinet Members and Council officers will be expected to attend any NF meeting when asked to do so by the Chairman. Such requests must be reasonable in terms of notice, demand and expectation.
16. A supporting officer from KCC and GBC will always be present at all NF meetings. They will help plan, manage and co-ordinate the business for the NF; provide procedural and constitutional advice; and will take notes of and actions arising from the meetings.

Actions

17. It is expected that NF Chairman will take the lead in pursuing actions resulting from meetings and reporting back to the NF's.

Issues of interest to more than one NF

18. Any follow up work on issues involving more than one NF will be the responsibility of all Chairmen and Officers involved.

Discussion of Individual Officers

19. No discussion shall take place in a meeting about the terms or conditions of employment or the performance, or conduct of any officer of any Council

E-Government

20. Copies of agendas, agenda items, notes and actions are published on the KCC and GBC websites.

