

**Area Forum Community Representatives Consultation meeting regarding the 2015/ 2016
Budget proposals**

Tuesday 10 February 2015 at 5.30pm, Committee Room A, Town Hall

Present: John Farnworth
Vincent McNulty
David Blacker MBE
Gavin Quick
Brian Coope
Stuart Grimes
Maureen Stainton
Julie Bascombe
Bill Winder
Ian Cooper
David Lemming
Brenda Giles
Angela Buss
Suzanne Forbes
Ann Allen
John Garnham
Amanda Jones
Jayne Porter
Christopher Jarvis
Barbara Charlton
Carole Holmes

In Attendance: Mr Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Regulatory Services
Mrs Lorraine Hurst, Head of Democratic Governance
Miss Yvonne Burnett

Mr Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Regulatory Services explained that the purpose of the consultation meeting was to receive feedback from the Area Forum Community Representatives on behalf of their respective Area Forums. He reminded the Representatives that in order to meet Blackpool Council's required budget savings of £25 million during the financial year 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016, it had been proposed to cease the Area Forum budgets from 1 April 2015, amounting to approximately £150,000.

Mr Towers reported that feedback from a number of consultation meetings would be considered by the Executive, including the comments from this meeting and the statement made by a number of Community Representatives following their meeting on 12 January 2015. The Executive would then make its recommendations to Council at its meeting on 23 February and the budget for 2015/ 2016 would then be agreed at the Budget Council meeting on Friday 27 February 2015.

Mr Towers explained to the Community Representatives that the proposal was for the cessation of the Area Forum budget and not the Area Forum meetings.

Mr Towers read the statement, referred to earlier in the meeting that had been signed by some Community Representatives from various Forums.

“Blackpool Area Forums Community Representatives meeting held on 12 January 2015

“In order to open as soon as possible – the debate about the future of Area Forums we the undersigned community representatives would like to add the following provisional suggestions:

1. That they continue to exist with Full Council endorsement and support even after the possible cessation of council funding.

In order for this to happen we believe we would need access continued Council resources in the form of professional Community Representatives assigned to this task plus venue acquisition at no cost and further comprehensive professional assistance from democratic services.

2. We understand the Councils necessity to save money, but at the same time we recognise all the many small Forum funded activities that have improved and enriched the lives of mho pf the most vulnerable citizens in Blackpool

Therefore we respectfully request the assistance of Blackpool Council in seeking out and applying for Community Grant Funding on our behalf. So that we can continue to put ‘people first’ in Blackpool.

Finally, we would have a preference for a substantial reduction in our funding in the first year rather than a complete cessation of it. However, we again recognise the painful and difficult decisions facing the Councillors and Council Officers, and we desire to work together to with them keep the Forums alive and contributing towards the greater good of Blackpool”.

The meeting supported the statement and the proposal to reduce the Forum funding as opposed to the complete cessation and suggested an amount of between £30,000 and £50,000. It was put forward by one of the community representatives that the funding could be shared between the seven Forums and used to match fund projects with a limit of £500 per applicant.

The Representatives felt that the cessation of the funding in its entirety would negatively affect enthusiasm within the voluntary community, at a time when there should be support and encouragement for community engagement. It was believed that the involvement in community projects had a positive impact on individuals’ physical and mental health.

In response to a question, Mr Towers confirmed that a decision had not been taken nor a proposal made regarding the outstanding funds following the last cycle of Area Forum. He added that it was unlikely that a decision would be taken prior to April 2015.

A Revoe Community Representative reported that without the support from Area Forum funding it would not have been possible to establish the local Choir, which now had 40 members and was self-sufficient.

It was explained that if the decision was taken to reduce the Forum funding (rather than cease completely) then the difference would still need to found elsewhere from the Council’s budget to meet the required level of savings.

A member of the Group asked if funding for other voluntary groups supported by the Council would cease. Mr Towers explained that grants to voluntary organisations had ceased following previous year's budget savings, he added that the majority of the associated cost for supporting the Area Forums related to staffing costs and this next year had resulted in two redundancies from the Community Engagement Team and Democratic Governance.

In response to several questions regarding the consultation exercise, Mr Towers explained that the Community Representatives had been informed as soon as the proposal was within the public domain and prior to the last cycle of Forum meetings. He added that he had tried to be as inclusive and proportionate to the level of savings and the impact. It was suggested that a spokesperson from the Community Representatives could attend the Executive meeting on 23 February to present the Area Forums viewpoint and suggest the alternative proposal.

Mr Towers advised the Group that there were Local Elections on 7 May and the structure of the Council would be agreed at the Annual Council meeting on 22 May, at which stage the Committee, Partnerships and Forums structure etc. would be agreed. He explained that both Democratic Governance and Community Engagement would support the Council's wishes in relation to the Area Forums, but he could not make any commitments for the future, until the outcome of the elections and the wishes of the Council were known.

In response to a question, Mr Towers confirmed that the Councillors ward budget had been reduced in previous years from £25,000 per ward in 2010 and it was proposed to retain the budgets at £15,000 per ward for 2015/ 2016.

The statement, mentioned earlier in the meeting was circulated to allow other Community Representatives the opportunity to show their support by signing the document.

It was proposed, seconded and unanimously agreed by the Area Forum Community Representatives present that Mr Dave Blacker MBE, would be the spokesman for the Area Forums and he would submit an application to speak at the Executive meeting on 23 February 2015.

The meeting closed at 6.20pm