

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>COUNCIL</b>
<b>Relevant Officer:</b>	Carmel McKeogh, Deputy Chief Executive Mark Towers, Director of Governance and Regulatory Services
<b>Relevant Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Blackburn, Leader of the Council
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	8 July 2015

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### 1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 To consider the recommendation of the Executive from its meeting on 22 June 2015 relating to the role of the Area Forums along with other forms of community engagement.

### 2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 To agree the discontinuation of the Area Forums with effect from 1 September 2015.

### 3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

- 3.1 The Council at the Annual Meeting agreed not to schedule meetings of the Area Forums for the June/ July cycle, but wanted to look at other forms of community engagement and public involvement before considering their future. This report to the Executive sought to look at the different forms of community engagement currently in practice.

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| 3.2a | Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? | No, but the Area Forums are part of the Council's constitution and require a Council decision to disestablish them. |
| 3.2b | Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget?                  | Yes   |

3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

To continue with the Area Forums and not pursue the other forms of community engagement, either on a reduced meeting cycle basis or by the merger of the seven forums to a smaller number, as suggested by the community representatives.

**4.0 Council Priority:**

4.1 The relevant Council Priority is “Create safer communities and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour” and “Deliver quality services through a professional, well-rewarded and motivated workforce”.

**5.0 Background Information**

5.1 The Executive at its meeting on 22 June 2015 considered proposals as to how to create greater public engagement through a variety of mediums.

5.2 The report considered by the Executive concludes that the pilot community engagement projects which had been undertaken were successful and effective. The Council Couch revealed that the majority of citizens were generally happy with the service they received. People liked the opportunity to talk to the Council, informally at a time and place that suited them, but they generally were not motivated to attend meetings (such as Area Forum meetings) or actively seek the Council out unless something concerns them.

5.3 It was considered that Area Forums had served their original purpose and in times of austerity could be seen as a less effective model of engagement which delivered limited returns for the amount of resource invested in them. The pressures on the organisation and on the community meant that a greater range of more responsive tools was required. The Executive was also reminded that in setting this financial year’s revenue budget the Council had agreed to cease the Area Forum ‘grant’ funding in the sum of £158,000.

5.4 The decision notice from the Executive meeting is attached at Appendix 8(a).

Does the information submitted include any exempt information?

No

**List of Appendices:**

Appendix 8(a) – Executive Decision Notice EX25/2015

**6.0 Legal considerations:**

6.1 The Area Forums are part of the Council’s Constitution and are appointed by Council and therefore it has to be Council which disestablishes them.

**7.0 Human Resources considerations:**

7.1 There has been a full time officer in Democratic Governance and a full time officer in the Community Engagement Team who have both taken voluntary redundancy in this current financial year and will not be replaced. Both teams support the Area Forums and a reduction in staff will make the task of supporting Area Forums going forward extremely challenging if they were to continue. (Additionally, these two teams also lost a full time officer each last financial year, which led to the ceasing of the Area Panels, following consultation with the Community Representatives and the agreement of Council).

**8.0 Equalities considerations:**

8.1 More options to engage with the community will ensure that less people will be disconnected with the Council and different methods of engagement will prevent discrimination and promote diversity and inclusivity for all groups of people.

**9.0 Financial considerations:**

9.1 There will be a saving of approximately £18,000 from the Area Forum budget, which covers allowances to Community Representatives, hire of rooms, teas and coffees etc. Savings will also be made in terms of officer time and also in not replacing the two members of staff mentioned in paragraph 7.1 of the Executive report. There is budget available to pay allowances for Community Representatives up to the end of December to assist with the transition period as stated in para 5.7 of the Executive report.

9.2 The Council as part of its budget approval process this year has previously agreed to cease the Area Forum 'grant' funding totalling £158,000.

**10.0 Risk management considerations:**

10.1 Ineffective engagement will mean that the Council is making its decisions on unrepresentative information. The Council needs to be assured that the engagement and consultation it undertakes is as effective and representative as it can be.

**11.0 Ethical considerations:**

11.1 The Council has to be accountable and act with integrity in regard to its decision making and effective and representative engagement will help achieve this.

**12.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:**

12.1 The Council has held a consultation event with the Community Representatives and 19 were in attendance on Monday 8 June. The Community Representatives on the whole acknowledged that Area Forums had to change but they still believed that they were a viable way to engage with the community. It was acknowledged that the other forms of community engagement, which had been introduced, recently added to the engagement process. Some of the options put forward by the Community Representatives were to merge the Forums, to have for example three Forums covering Blackpool or to rethink the Forum's agenda to make it more engagement focused, to see if this would be more relevant to local communities. There was also a common view that the Forums were not just about giving grants but sought to engage with local communities.

**13.0 Background papers:**

13.1 None.