
Governance Committee: Plans for future Member Community Engagement to replace County Local Committees

Background and context

- 1** CLCs were introduced as a mechanism for county councillors to engage with their communities. There are currently 11 CLCs across the county. In the Arun District the CLCs were intended to operate as Joint Area Committees. CLCs used to meet three times per year and were open for anyone to attend. The Governance Committee agreed to cancel the meetings due to be held in 2020/21 due to the impact of COVID-19 and the pressure on Council business and capacity.
- 2** As part of the Council's Budget for 2021/22, it was decided that the Community Initiative Fund (CIF) would cease. The allocation of this local grant funding has been a key role for CLCs and the removal of this function is one driver for change. Other decisions taken by CLCs relate to Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). For 2019/20 and 2020/21 CLCs dealt with 11 TRO decisions, as well as each CLC receiving a TRO prioritisation report. Decisions relating to TROs, including local member participation can be achieved through other means, as can the appointments to some outside bodies which CLCs have exercised.
- 3** The core purpose of CLCs has been seen as engagement with the public with a strong focus on the 'Talk With Us' element of the meeting, and an ability to react to local issues. However, public attendance at CLCs is generally low, except when there is a special/significant issue of local interest being discussed. Officers across the Council engage with members in their locality on a variety of specific service-based issues/casework.
- 4** Whilst the CLCs in Arun District were intended to operate as 'joint' committees, these have not worked well as it is rare for any District business to be included and they are very large committees.
- 5** The CLC meetings which were due to be held in June/July 2021 are being used for virtual locality sessions based on a district/borough footprint. These will provide a mixture of place-based induction for councillors alongside a 'Talk With Us' session, giving residents the opportunity to meet and ask questions of their local councillors. This digital 'Talk With Us' approach may encourage a wider audience.
- 6** It is proposed that this approach be used as a model for future community forums to be trialled for a year supported by Democratic Services and the Communities Directorate, with a view to identifying some staff savings depending on the outcome of the one-year trial.

Proposal details

- 7** It is proposed that the new County Local Forums should meet on a district/borough footprint. As the locality session in June 2021 in Adur and Worthing was a joint session it is recommended that the relevant county councillors should be consulted on their preferences as to whether they continue to meet jointly or as separate forums. In addition, the Governance Committee acknowledges that, whilst single sessions based on a borough or district footprint will work for more urban areas, there needs to be flexibility in the arrangements for larger district areas with disparate population centres to choose the most suitable arrangements, based on the topics under discussion.

8 The aims of a new model of engagement are set out in the below table:

Aim	County Local Forum
Enhancing and supporting the local role of members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice and information for members on their local role (managing casework and using social media) • Members signposted to key contacts • Providing members with local insight and data on their communities, introduction to County Council services delivered locally and an opportunity to showcase local community organisations (and meet local partners and community organisations) • Opportunity to learn and exchange ideas, exploring local issues/priorities, responding to questions, visiting (where possible) new ventures/services • Ensure local members' knowledge is used by the Council through their role as community champions
Ensuring openness and transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The potential to arrange ad hoc local meetings for timely consultation/engagement on topical issues locally or to raise the profile of local services. Options to hold jointly with partners and meet virtually to enable wider participation. • Continue to provide a forum for public Q&A session with county councillors
Maintaining and enhancing engagement with communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess any gaps in current engagement mechanisms • Supporting members to be connected into activity in their community through various networks (e.g. voluntary and community sector organisations) • Use of digital technology to enable members to interact more flexibly with their communities • Use existing spaces for face-to-face contact to enable engagement with people who aren't digitally connected • Opportunities to involve members of the Youth Cabinet at a more local level

9 When social distancing guidelines allow, the Governance Committee feels in-person sessions will be preferable to virtual meetings, particularly for more controversial subjects. Virtual meetings may work better in some instances and have been shown to enable greater member attendance, particularly for those with work or family commitments. Future meetings can utilise digital tools, building on this learning and the locality sessions in June/July 2021. Whilst meetings will have no need for formal agenda and minutes, actions and outcomes will be recorded.

10 Following the decision taken in the 2020/21 budget to remove CIF grants, the only remaining decisions left for CLCs concern some TROs (those with local objections and not delegated to officers), which can be dealt with by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport in consultation with relevant local members. There will continue to be engagement with local communities and local members will also retain a role in the prioritising of TROs in their area. Outside body appointments previously made by CLCs, where still required, would be made by the relevant Cabinet member in consultation with local members.

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- 11** The Governance Committee will consider more detailed proposals for the new County Local Forums at its meeting in September and will ensure that, whilst allowing for local flexibility, there is an underlying consistent approach to the new mechanism for community engagement. This will allow the new forums to be assessed at the end of the pilot year and it is proposed that the new model will be reviewed ahead of March 2022 in order to establish a new working model for 2022/23.

Consultation, engagement and advice

- 12** Arun District Council, all county councillors and town and parish councils were invited to provide comment on the proposal and feedback received has been taken into account in the Governance Committee's recommendations.

Finance

- 13** There is a potential for initial saving of one post in Democratic Services: £34,100 (by September 2021). Future savings opportunities will be explored and assessed through the one-year trial.
- 14** The resource implications of alternative mechanisms for community engagement will need to be assessed as part of the review and further savings may be identified once a model is established.

Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigation
Loss of local democratic debate on issues	Any new model will ensure a strong level of community engagement and democratic input.
Decisions on Traffic Regulation Orders not taken locally	Decision by Cabinet Member will be in consultation with local members.

Policy alignment and compliance

- 15** A continuation of community engagement through more flexible working arrangements will have a positive effect on communities as it will allow for a greater level of community engagement, and an opportunity to reach a wider and more diverse audience.
- 16** There are no social value, crime and disorder, human rights or legal implications. Climate Change implications are positive, with virtual meetings leading to a reduction in travel and therefore in carbon emissions.
- 17** The proposal in this report support two of the objectives in the Council Plan:
- Helping people and communities to fulfil their potential.
 - Making the best use of resources.

Recommended

- (1) That County Local Committees be removed from the Constitution and decision-making arrangements for Traffic Regulation Orders and outside

body appointments allocated to the relevant Cabinet Members in consultation with local members;

- (2) That the Governance Committee considers detailed proposals at its next meeting for a trial of district/borough-based County Local Forums; and
- (3) That the arrangements be reviewed by the end March 2022, to determine future arrangements and resource requirements.

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Background papers

None