

Consultation feedback on plans for County Local Forms

All county councillors and town/parish councils were invited to give feedback on the proposals. As County Local Committees (CLCs) in the Arun area were joint with the District Council, Arun District Council was invited to comment. Responses were received from seven county councillors, two town/parish councils and from Arun District Council.

1. Summary of feedback from county councillors

a) What would a successful County Local Forum look like? What outcomes should we be seeking and what measures of success should we use to assess these at the end of the one-year trial?

- **What a successful County Forum would look like:** Good and sustained level of public attendance. Engaging, two-way conversations with people's issues heard and dealt with. Open, accessible, inclusive, welcoming, vibrant, fun. Not too formal or intimidating. Collaborative: working in partnership with the public and other relevant organisations/businesses to solve problems. More than just a talking shop: people will only take part if they see it is worthwhile, and action is taken. Being honest, open and willing to listen, learn and engage to solve our joint problems should lead to a different tone.
- **Outcomes:** Members help/act on residents' problems, regardless of whether it is the responsibility of the County Council. Public are better informed about plans affecting them/their locality and about the County Council and its decisions. Improved ways of working between the layers of local government. Low-level highways issues dealt with in a more timely and resident-friendly way. Use the knowledge of communities to help decisions and to form the sort of community relations we need for the future. Residents are more understanding and aware of the challenges the Council faces.
- **Measures of success:** Sustained levels of public attendance. Satisfied customers and members (assessed through feedback forms). A wider range of questions/issues raised (not just highways-related). A wider audience engaged with (including minority groups and young people).

b) What different formats and ways of working should we be testing during the trial?

- Meetings should last at least an hour and all councillors should be clearly identified as such in the meetings. A wider range of people are reached through holding both virtual and in-person meetings, holding them at different times of the day and at different locations. Venues for meetings should move around and use libraries and locations where people meet (e.g. community centres, schools): go out to meet people at times and places that suit them, rather than expecting them to come to us in the evening. Arrangements should be in the interests of residents rather than the Council.
- Consider trialling different approaches in different places – embrace change and try out different ideas rather than continuing with previous arrangements. Hold drop-in sessions rather than one fixed time and hybrid meetings if possible, so people can either join in person or

remotely and explore opportunities for streaming. Have smaller break-out sessions for those less confident speaking in public/in front of a large group of people.

- Multi-level, involving all tiers of local government as well as resident groups.
- Invite feedback from residents, including through a “leave us a message” part of the meeting – e.g. post-it notes on the wall to hear and take on board. Also through regular polling of public satisfaction with WSCC services, to benchmark, monitor and improve WSCC customer service performance.

c) What do you see as the key issues for County Local Forums to consider/discuss in your area?

- Any that affect residents, regardless of whether it is the responsibility of the County Council: they should be a one-stop shop, rather than passing responsibilities to a different tier of local government.
- Highways and transport, including highways maintenance, potholes, parking, speeding, cycle routes, pedestrian infrastructure, access to public transport and sustainable transport methods.
- Social care services, environmental issues/climate change, mental health, social isolation, affordable housing and affordable business properties, people-friendly places in centres, youth issues, over development of residential property; removal of public services, failing infrastructure and town centres. Police involvement to update on current issues and answer questions from residents (a big attraction to the CLCs).
- Consideration of community-requested traffic regulation orders (TROs) and community highways schemes (CHS), which were previously reviewed by CLCs - should be decided by the Cabinet Member in conjunction with relevant member, but community engagement needs to happen prior to these decisions. It was suggested that parishes could advise the best way forward, share ideas and move forward without using County Local Forum as this is the biggest problem that affects parishes/towns.
- Need to offer officer support to town and parish councils for informal discussions of their problems, including traffic and highways related issues.

d) Who should be engaged in these forums and how can we reach out to a wider audience within your communities?

- **Who should be engaged:** Residents; local businesses; transport companies (bus and rail operators); schools and colleges; minority groups; district/ borough councillors.
- **How to reach a wider audience:** important to hold meetings at different times of the day and in different locations, as well as looking at more modern ways of engaging using a less formal approach. Advertising/publicising meetings was highlighted, including through more traditional methods such as leaflets/flyers. The potential to use the school network to advertise to parents should be explored. Social media might be better utilised if there were permanent web pages and accounts.

e) Your views on the recent Locality Sessions held as part of the induction; what aspects of these worked well or less well – and any learning from these we should build into the new arrangements.

- The “Talk with Us” session needs to be longer and at the start of the meeting.
- Having a local update was helpful, but it can be difficult handling public questions in a virtual setting.
- Share successes to promote the value of the Forum: for example, one resident has had progress with an issue as a result of the Locality Session.
- A Member should be Chairman of these meetings.
- It would be wrong to make any judgement based on one session conducted against the exceptional backdrop of a pandemic emergency.

f) How best to operate any form of public question and answer sessions or public workshop discussions with county councillors going forward

- Use a hybrid format, have plenty of signposting materials at the meetings for follow-up. Keep the contributions focused and succinct to maximise the number of people who can engage. Have a longer time for the dialogue, broken up into sections. Use feedback forms or post-it to capture all views.
- Questions should be submitted in writing beforehand (by midday two working days before the forum) with one supplementary question allowed with limited accompanying context setting statement. Questions should be available for all to see during the forum.
- Use facilitators and more up to date ways of holding discussions, such as smaller groups and sitting in circles, which are less intimidating.
- Question and Answer sessions need to be more frequent (although this may be difficult for councillors who work) - you bring about change by positive and more frequent engagement and conversations.
- Develop a “Talk with Us” App to enable users to review topical issues, forward their views and engage directly with their county councillor; also to allow WSCC to monitor public opinion on key topics. Also develop a “Talk with Us” social media channel (e.g. Facebook/Twitter).

2. Summary of feedback from town and parish councils

Two responses were received, from Felpham Parish Council and Deane Neighbourhood Council. Key points raised are set out below:

- All questions should be answered at the Forum even if the questioner is not in attendance.
- We question if the County Local Forum will be of any value to us. We have contact with our local councillors whenever necessary and we are generally only interested in matters concerning our area. In future will we be informed of any public representations or queries regarding our area?
 - The main benefit to us of the CLC meetings were the reports updating Highway projects. Our main concern is how we will receive this information in future.

3. Response from Arun District Council

- The CLCs were the only opportunity for all levels of local government to get together, and members would like that mechanism to be retained. Public involvement is key, as this was the only vehicle where they could directly engage with police and others. It was felt that parishes that derived greatest benefit from CLCs.
- Ultimately, Arun councillors want to have good community engagement, across all levels of local government, with a particular focus on highways issues. They would like these to be clearly diarised, but no preferences on the format of the Forums were expressed. Concern was expressed that Arun will only have one Forum and whether the level of engagement with each district and borough will match their respective size.
- Arun's primary concern is on highways matters, and the potential loss of local involvement in getting TROs in place and that the new process will be even more distant and challenging. TROs and being able to discuss these with highways officers was a particularly strongly held view and is one of the primary issues residents raise with district councillors.
- A secondary concern was on the practical arrangements for the Forums and the need for more information on this. What does "flexibility" mean, what will the pilot arrangements look like, which members will be involved (just county?) and how will agendas be set?