

**Cabinet - 8 May 2014**

**Report of the Interim Executive Director for Environment**

Electoral Division affected: None
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**Developing the Three Tier Forums**

(Appendix 'A' refers)

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**Executive Summary**

Three Tier Forums were developed in 2011, following the disestablishment of the Lancashire Local Committees. Three Tier Forums were designed to be informal business meetings where all local county councillors; an equal number of district councillors and a parish and town council representative are able to discuss and influence issues at a strategic level that are of importance to their district across the three tiers of local government.

A key priority of the County Council is to review and develop the current Three Tier Forums with an early action being to encourage Forums to open up to the public. This review, which commenced in July/August 2013 and involved wide consultation, has clear links to the significant transformation that the County Council is undertaking in response to budget reductions. It also relates very closely to the review of the Authority's political governance structure; which is to investigate options for any change in political management structure and make recommendations to Full Council on a future governance structure in December 2014.

Within the review of Three Tier Forums, proposals received from Lancaster and Chorley have the potential to provide a valuable opportunity to test out models, as the organisation undergoes this significant transformation and considers, as part of this, what model of local governance, if any, at a local level might be appropriate.

Given the significance of the reviews of both organisational and political management structures, it would be appropriate to include the development of Three Tier forums in these processes.

This report gives some further background to the Three Tier Forums; provides a summary so far of the review, including the details of the Lancaster and Chorley pilot models; sets out the organisational context within which it is now taking place and makes a number of proposals.

## **Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended to;

- (i) Agree the development of two test models, one in Lancaster and the other in Chorley, subject to proposals for the Chorley model outlined in section 6.2.a) in the report; and that any decision to continue with either of these should form part of the review of the future political governance structure for the County Council;
- (ii) Agree that work to link the Three Tier Forum in Rossendale with the Neighbourhood Forums continues to develop;
- (iii) Agree that the County Council's preferred position is that the current Forums will meet in public; and that where this is not the case there will be no extra officer attendance from the County Council, beyond that currently in place, and no devolution of decision making power or budget by the County Council should be considered in those forums not meeting in public, and
- (iv) Agree to maintain the status quo in relation to parish and town council representation on the Forums outside of the Chorley test model.

## **1. Background and Advice**

Three Tier Forums were first piloted in three districts, Burnley, Wyre and South Ribble in 2010. Following this it was agreed, in August 2011, to roll out the Three Tier Forums to the remaining nine districts and this roll out was completed by January 2012.

They were developed following the disestablishment of the previous model of Lancashire Local Committees. These were formally constituted bodies with shaping, influencing and decision making powers.

The Three Tier Forums were set up to provide an informal mechanism that enables councillors from the three tiers of local government, on a district footprint, to come together to discuss strategic issues of importance to their district. They were designed to be different from the formally constituted Lancashire Locals and currently operate as informal business meetings. They also provided a place around the table, with equal status, for a representative from the Parish and Town Councils in a district.

They currently do not have any specific shaping, influencing or decision making powers. However it was made clear from the outset that significant weight would be given to any views of the Three Tier Forum in relation to service priorities. Councillors from all three tiers of local government have therefore been able to

influence and shape the work; particularly of the Environment Directorate through their involvement in the development of the District Commissioning Plans.

The intention has always been to broaden out the focus of the Forums to consider the full range of services delivered on a district footprint by all three tiers of government. In some cases this has started to develop, particularly in relation to the health agenda, and it is intended that this work continue, where appropriate, following the review.

## **2. Review of Three Tier Forums**

One of the County Council's priorities is a review of Three Tier Forums. The parameters of the review have been flexible in that the Leader of the County Council, in consulting on the future of three tier forums has made it clear that one size does not need to fit all. However it has been clearly stated that any arrangements need to be two/three way and benefit all parties. In a letter from the Leader of the County Council to District Leaders she states *'the importance of all parties having a shared view and ownership of arrangements, and a commitment to wanting to develop arrangements that were felt to be worthwhile that added value and that were genuinely owned'*. This has enabled the Forums, districts, and other partners, to make a wide range of suggestions. It has also provided an opportunity for districts to consider very different proposals which range from a formal joint committee to a more consultative forum.

The review took place during the late summer and autumn of 2013. Forums, districts and parish council representative bodies were asked to share their views on how they would like to see their meetings develop. The review was undertaken in two parts; firstly all members of the Three Tier Forums were asked for their views on how they wish to see the Forum in their district develop and secondly District Leaders and Parish Representative Bodies were asked for their views.

One of the key principles set out in the review was the desire to increase openness and transparency by opening meetings up to the public. This has already happened in eight of the twelve districts with Fylde, Ribble Valley, South Ribble and Wyre currently preferring to maintain the status quo and not open meetings to the public. This can be reviewed at any time.

## **3. Summary of the review**

It is clear from the responses to this review that there is not a consensus of opinion across all twelve Forums or districts. As such it does not seem likely, at this point, that a joint position with a standard model would meet the requirements of each Forum or district.

All twelve Three Tier Forums provided information for the review, outlining how they would like to see the Forums develop. Five district leaders from Chorley, Fylde, Hyndburn, Lancaster and South Ribble provided formal responses to the Leader of the County Council's letter. Another five responses, from Burnley, Pendle, Preston, Ribble Valley and Rossendale, came from the district leaders via discussions with

officers, whilst West Lancashire and Wyre chose not to provide a formal or informal response from their district leaders.

Out of these responses formal proposals have been received from Lancaster City Council and Chorley Borough Council. Following meetings with both authorities, work has been taking place to develop these proposals and the current draft Terms of Reference (ToR) are included at Appendix 'A'.

These proposals represent two different approaches and as such they present an opportunity to test different models of governance at a local level. This may prove useful as the County Council undergoes significant transformation over the next eighteen months and looks to develop approaches to working at a locality level.

The Lancaster model focuses on developing a joint committee, with the potential for devolved budgets and decision making. This has the potential to provide a locality based governance model that would provide a platform for exploring how we could work differently with the City Council.

The Chorley model is designed to be a consultative forum and does not currently involve decision making or devolution of budgets. The focus is a forum where neighbourhood issues of a strategic nature, across the 3 tiers, can be discussed. It presents the borough with an opportunity to bring a different focus to working jointly with the parishes in Chorley.

Rossendale Borough Council has more recently submitted a proposal and we have been working with officers to develop this further. Early indications are that it will represent little change in terms of resource implications or structure of meetings, the proposal centres on linking neighbourhood forum issues into the agenda setting for the meetings, where this is appropriate. It also presents the Borough Council with a mechanism for channelling neighbourhood issues when they change how they provide support to the four Neighbourhood Forums at the end of March 2014. As such it is proposed that these changes are noted and that work to develop the links to the Neighbourhood Forums continues.

Outlined in the table below is a summary of the main themes emerging from the review, beyond the formal proposals.

#### **Summary table of themes emerging from review**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Theme supported by Forum</b>	<b>Theme supported by District</b>
Interest in devolution/decisions making	Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle	Burnley, Hyndburn
Interest shown in broadening scope of areas/topics considered by forum	Burnley, Chorley, Fylde, Hyndburn, Lancaster, Pendle, Rossendale, Wyre	Burnley, Chorley, Fylde, Lancaster, Rossendale

Preference for maintaining status quo with public element	Preston	Preston
Preference for maintaining status quo without public element	Fylde, South Ribble, Ribble Valley, Wyre	South Ribble, Fylde
Suggested increase in Parish and Town Council representation	West Lancashire, Chorley, Pendle, Wyre	Chorley (as part of formal proposal)
Suggested increase in frequency of meetings (Burnley, Chorley, Hyndburn and Lancaster suggest increase to 4, Pendle suggest 6/8 weekly)	Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle	Chorley and Lancaster (as part of formal proposals)

### **Specific issues highlighted by districts**

- a. Fylde Borough Council has requested more senior officer and senior political representation at the Forums, to make them more effective. It is unlikely that the level of senior officer support requested is practical when considered against our current arrangements at other forums and bearing in mind resource implications; currently officer support is provided through attendance of Locality Officers at each meeting, plus governance support from a Democratic Services officer. Cabinet Members may choose to attend Forum meetings for a specific reason, an example being the budget item that went to the November meetings. However it is not intended that Cabinet Members will attend Forum meetings on a regular basis. Where Cabinet Members do attend regularly this is in their role as a district county councillor on the Forum outside of their role as a cabinet member on the County Council.
- b. Hyndburn Borough Council have recently submitted a response from the group leaders via the Leader of the Borough Council, which requests that the Forum be given some form of delegated budget responsibility; to enable it to make decisions at a local level. As set out in the recommendations this issue should be considered as part of the wider review of the future political governance structures for the County Council.
- c. South Ribble Borough Council have requested that rather than make any changes to the Three Tier Forum they would prefer to look at opportunities to work together with the County Council more efficiently and effectively. This work is being developed outside the scope of the review by the County Council's District Lead Senior Officer, supported by the Locality Officer.

#### **4. Organisational Context**

As this review commenced last year consideration of these proposals now needs to be aligned to the major process of organisational transformation that the County Council is undergoing. This includes the options and necessary actions being explored for the political governance system for the authority.

The transformation process will create a new organisation aligned to its key priorities and to substantially reduced future resources. An entirely new officer structure will be created by 2016.

The ongoing review and developments for Three Tier Forums, as now reported, will reflect and be considered as part of the broader process of organisational transformation and it is also suggested, will naturally form part of the review of political governance structures which will include governance arrangements for any area body structure. This review will be reporting back to the County Council's Full Council in December 2014. This will mean that any current or future developments, including work to develop the two test models in Lancaster and Chorley may be affected by the outcome of this review.

#### **5. Resource Implications**

Aligned to this is the recognition that any developments need to be considered against the officer resource available to support them. A number of proposals acknowledge this and make suggestions as to how Forums could be supported jointly by county and district officers. This suggestion was included in the proposals from Lancaster and Chorley and is part of the development of the proposals. It is felt that with this joint approach it would be possible to support the current proposals; but the position would need to be reviewed should other Forums wish to develop further proposals.

Future resourcing will be a significant factor of the broader transformational change programme and resource capacity will continue to be a key consideration of the development of Three Tier Forums in each district.

#### **6. Proposals**

Following the review and the issues highlighted; and bearing in mind the wider organisational context within which this review is now taking place it is proposed that:

1. the test models in Lancaster and Chorley continue to be developed with the respective city and borough councils providing an opportunity to test out different models at a local level; being conscious that the outcome of the review of political governance structures may affect whether these fit within the overall governance structure that may be agreed.
  - a) The ToR developed for the Chorley test model be agreed on the understanding that beyond the Locality Officer there will not be regular officer attendance from the County Council, other than when issues are of such strategic importance that officer attendance is required to move the

issue forward; and that the issue of how the Forum deals with the public question time will be decided by the chair once elected; that Cabinet agrees the proposal to rename the Forum to Chorley 3 Tier Liaison Meeting.

- b) That the draft ToR for Lancaster continues to be developed.
  - c) That work continues to develop links to Neighbourhood Forums in Rossendale as proposed as this represents little change to the structure of the Forum or the resources required.
2. the County Council's preference is for the current Forums to meet in public; and where this is not the case there will be no extra officer attendance from the County Council, beyond that currently in place, and no devolution of decision making power or budget by the County Council should be considered in those forums not meeting in public.
  3. that the status quo is maintained in respect of Parish and Town Council representation on the Forums outside of the Chorley pilot model which will provide us with experience of wider parish engagement.

## **Consultations**

As set out in the report.

## **Implications:**

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

## **Risk management**

By following the proposals contained in the report the risk of developing this work outside of the significant organisational change currently being undertaken is limited. Not following the proposals may prevent opportunities to test locally focused models of councillor engagement.

## **Financial**

At this stage the proposals set out in this report have no direct financial implications, although there may be implications for the prioritisation of the use of officer resources in order to deliver the pilot work proposed with Chorley and Lancaster.

Looking forward any proposals for the devolution of financial responsibility either to Three Tier Forums or other locality structures and the necessary systems, processes and levels of officer support will need to be reflected both in the review of the County Council's political governance structures and the proposals for the reshaping of the organisation which are currently under development. Given the likely level of resources available to deliver the entirety of the County Council's services there will be a premium on any arrangements reflecting simplicity and delivering added value in some way, potentially through the pooling of resources from different organisations.

## List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Directorate/Tel
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N/A

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A