

# Joint Neighbourhood Forums

to be considered  
in conjunction  
with them  
A4

## Terms of Reference

### Principles

Cumbria County Council and Copeland Borough Council affirm their commitment to Neighbourhood Forums, to the key role of Neighbourhood Forums in their respective consultation strategies and to Neighbourhood Forums' role in enhancing democratic accountability and community involvement in the democratic process.

All County and Borough Councillors are urged to support Neighbourhood Forums and ensure that a minimum of two formal Forum meetings are convened in each Forum area every year, meeting in public, with the opportunity for members of the public to speak or ask questions.

Neighbourhood Forums should generate their own agenda and be able to make recommendations or refer issues to any properly constituted committee, forum or panel of any local authority.

Neighbourhood Forums are not and, in the case of the County Council, may not be standing committees of the respective councils. Therefore legislation prevents the delegation of spending powers to Neighbourhood Forums.

### Procedures

Where a Neighbourhood Forum chooses to appoint as chair a person who is a County or Borough Councillor, the Forum Chair should alternate annually between a County Councillor and a Borough Councillor.

Note: In the first year ONLY, the Forum Chair should alternate six-monthly with the first Chair being an existing (or re-elected) councillor.

Neighbourhood Forums should rarely need to make formal decisions other than by broad consensus. Where a formal decision is necessary and a broad consensus is uncertain, a formal vote shall be taken by a show of hands, with all persons present exercising one vote.

Each Neighbourhood Forum should prepare a set of criteria which will be used in the assessment of applications for grant aid and in making recommendations for awards. These criteria should be reviewed at least annually.

Applications to Neighbourhood Forums for Grant Aid should be made on joint application forms.

In dealing with Forum Grants budgets, each Forum shall be considered to have a single grants budget to be made up of contributions from the respective councils. A Forum's recommendations for awards shall be for single amounts from their grants budget.

As Neighbourhood Forums are not standing committees of the councils, spending powers for Grant Aid are as follows:

1. Where a Forum meets 2 or more times a year in public:
  - Awards up to £3,000 or 25% (whichever is the lower) of a Forum's Grants budget are delegated to officers.
  - Recommendations over £3,000 or 25% (whichever is the lower) of a Forum's Grants budget are referred to Area Committee AND Copeland Borough Council Cabinet/Policy Forum for decision.
2. Where a Forum does not meet 2 times a year in public:
  - All recommendations, however arrived at, are referred to Area Committee AND Copeland Borough Council Cabinet/Policy Forum for decision.

Officers with delegated powers to approve grant awards should have due regard to the recommendations of Neighbourhood Forums.

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As approved by:

Copeland Borough Council, Policy Forum – 4<sup>th</sup> April 2001 &

Cumbria County Council, Copeland Area Committee – 20<sup>th</sup> April 2001



**Appendix A****Supporting information on Joint Neighbourhood Forums in Copeland.**

Joint Neighbourhood Forums have been operational in Copeland since April 2001. Their operation is one of very few examples of close partnership working between the County Council and the Borough Council.

Neighbourhood Forums have three main functions, these being: -

- To encourage community participation in local issues.
- To provide an opportunity for two-way communication between councillors and the electorate.
- To assess grant applications from community groups or individuals

The concept of neighbourhood or community forums originated in the urban areas on the North East coast of America and were seen as a method of community consultation that allowed elected representatives to keep in touch with their electorate.

In the early 90's a group of Cumbria County Councillors went to America to observe how forums worked. They returned to Cumbria impressed with what they had seen and convinced that forums could play an important role in the community consultation process.

The first forums were set up in Cumbria in 1994 and, though few in number, their value was soon recognised. As the forums developed and grew over the years, each forum emerged with its own style and method of operating. This individuality of forums was and is seen as a good thing and continues to this day.

Presently in Copeland there are ten joint forums, all of which meet a minimum of four times a year. Each has a grants budget that varies according to the number of people living in the forum area. All the joint forums are well supported by county, borough, town and parish councillors

Many councillors see joint forums as an opportunity to meet up with members of the community they represent in a quite informal and hopefully friendly setting. In these hectic times when many councillors have meetings three and four times a week, many members have had to forgo surgeries. Neighbourhood Forums certainly fill the gap as regards 'face to face' contact between the electorate and their representatives at all levels.

Members of the public use joint forums as a way of getting to talk to their three tiers of local representation in one place at one time, thus cutting out the time and energy required in contacting three different councillors. There is no other readily available, similar opportunity to do this, and, as forums are held at least four times a year, the chance to 'kill three birds with one stone' is available on a regular basis.

From conversations I have had with both borough and county councillors it is clear that Forums provide a good opportunity to meet up with and, when discussing grants criteria or choosing a chairperson, to work together. It is felt that meeting and working together leads to a better relationship between the two groups and is one of the real benefits of partnership working that will lead to other opportunities for collaborative working and partnerships.

A good example of the partnership in action is the work undertaken in Cleator Moor with the Birks Road Residents Committee. Unhappy with commercial developments along Birks Road, local residents had raised the matter at their Neighbourhood Forum. Members and officers of both Borough and County Councils, working closely with representatives of the residents group, were able to negotiate a parking scheme that was acceptable to everyone and the use of an area of adjacent land for children to play on. The Forum made funds available to fence the land thus ensuring that the children were not in any danger from the increase in traffic on Birks Road due to the commercial development. These outcomes were well received by all involved and work on the play area will be completed shortly.

An ongoing example of the partnership working and the effectiveness of Joint Neighbourhood Forums, is the meeting of the Highways Sub group with representatives of the Bootle and Seascale Joint Forum to discuss and look at maintenance issues along the A595 south of Calderbridge. Concerns that were initially raised at the forum were referred to the Local Committee who in turn suggested the 'roving' meeting along the route for the sub group to meet up with community representatives, including a Borough Councillor. This close consultation has highlighted a number of maintenance issues and increased local participation in this matter.

The above are just two of many such examples of the type of partnership working that central government consistently encourage and promote in their pursuit of best value and 'joined up' service provision.

There are many new initiatives presently being developed within Copeland, Vital Villages, Market Towns Initiative, Healthy Communities, SRB Programmes, Rural Action Zones, Local Agenda 21 Grants Programme, to name but a few. Wherever it is appropriate, the Neighbourhood Development Team will be actively involved in supporting local groups working on these initiatives.

It should, however, be noted that there is a large amount of developmental work and awareness raising to be carried out to ensure that joint forums are effective in their actions and well attended. Research carried out for the County Council in 1998 suggested that only 5% of the electorate in Cumbria were aware of the existence of Neighbourhood Forums with only 1% having actually attended a forum meeting, though this group tended to be influential or active members of the local community. Whilst these percentages may well have increased during the last four years, there is still a long way to go and a lot of work to do. There is now a new Neighbourhood Development Officer in post, after carrying this vacancy within the Neighbourhood Development Team for some twelve months. Community and project development, together with awareness raising and increasing attendance at forum meetings, are top of his 'to do' list. The engagement of communities is not always easy, but it is essential if joint forums are to develop into effective vehicles for community participation.

Forums play a lead role in public accountability and as such each forum has the power to make referrals to a wide range of governmental organisations and other public bodies. Central government have recognised the role that forums play within local communities by clearly outlining the lead consultative role that they will play in the Local Strategic Partnerships that are emerging throughout the country.

When joint forums work well, and in the majority of cases they do, everyone, councillors included, who has attended the meeting leaves feeling better informed, more aware of community activity in their locality and more 'tied in' to their community. Comments such

## **Appendix B**

Each Forum area had a briefing meeting in July 2001 for Cumbria County & Copeland Borough Councillors, to establish how each Forum would operate, set grants criteria and elect a chair for the first year.

- Arlecdon and Frizington  
**Youth Issues:** Youth Partnership - John Seddon, Mary Kiplin, Groundwork, Derek Cotton Cumbria Assoc of Clubs for Young People, Jonathan Marriott Area Support Manager CCC  
**Traffic Issues:** Richard Hayward Area Engineer CCC  
Crime Prevention Stuart Burgess, Cumbria Police  
**Home Security:** Cath Howard, Age Concern  
**Facilities & Services for Young People:** Gillian Troughton Early Years Partnership & John Gray/Joy Bowe Cleator Moor & Frizington Youth Partnership.  
**Community issues, update on Youth issues**
- Bootle and Seascale  
**A595 de-trunking & general traffic issues:** Paul Gibbons CAPITAdbs, and  
**Rural transport issues:** Isabelle Thorn rural Transport link Officer  
**BNFL Emergency Planning:** David Humphries, CCC & Norman McPhail BNFL  
**A595 & General Traffic Issues:** Bob Holden Area Manager Highways Agency, David Bannerman Operations Manager Amey Mouchel & Richard Hayward Area Engineer Cumbria County Council  
**Railways, the Coastal Line:** Jonathan Smith Senior Public Transport Assistant (Rail) Cumbria County Council, & Grant applications
- Bransty and Harbour  
**Winter Maintenance in Whitehaven:** Chris Wallace, CCC, Keith Parker, CBC & Jonathan Marriott CCC  
**Traffic Issues:** Richard Hayward, CCC  
**Drug Awareness:** Mark Barrett, Turning Point  
**Crime & Disorder:** Stuart Burgess Community Safety, Cumbria  
**Sept 2002 – Environmental Hazards**
- Cleator Moor  
**Litter problems in forum area:** Janice Carroll, CBC  
**Food Co-operatives & Healthy Eating:** Julie Fletcher & Gary Messenger Countryside Agency  
**Crime Prevention:** Stuart Burgess Cumbria Police, **Home Security:** Cath Howard, Age Concern  
**+ 2 special meetings** to Discuss Birks Road at Cleator Moor.  
**Crime Prevention:** Stuart Burgess, Community Safety Officer, Cumbria Police.  
**Local Youth Services:** Hugh Branney Neighbourhood Development Officer (Youth), Tammy McClusky Cleator Moor Cadets
- Egremont and St Bees  
**Egremont Regeneration:** Brain Kirkbride, CBC, Colin Jackson Egremont Regeneration Partnership.  
**Volunteering:** Brenda Kelly, West Cumbria CVS, Annabelle Mackie Youth Offending Team.  
**Traffic issues:** Richard Hayward

**Egremont Credit Union: Robin Lacey**  
**Sept 2002 Policing Issues & Anti social behaviour**

- Gosforth and Ennerdale

**Duddon Crossing:** Kevin Walsh CCC, **A595 De trunking:** Jonathan Marriott, Isabel Thorn Cumbria Rural Transport Partnership

**Grants Core Group – April 2002**

**A595 Traffic Issues:** Bob Holden Area Manager Highways Agency, David Bannerman Operations Manager Amey Mouchel & Richard Hayward Area Engineer Cumbria County Council.

**Grants Core Group July 2002**

**Sept 2002 National Parks & Rural Action Zone (RAZ)**

- Hillcrest and Hensingham

**Youth Issues:** Jemma Foster Sports Development Officer CBC, Steve Mullen LA21 CBC, Andrew Haggerty Young Peoples Librarian, Jonathan Marriott

**Traffic Issues:** Richard Hayward.

**Recycling & Environmental Issues:** Janice Carroll CBC, Steve Mullen CBC.

**Crime Prevention:** Janet Poultney Crime Prevention Officer

**Oct 2002 Policing Issues**

- Millom

**Youth Offending Team:** Helen Blake

**Youth Issues in forum area:**, Daniel Carter, Cumbria Connexions

**Market Towns Initiative:** Pauline Herbert & Core Grants Group

**Policing Issues in the forum area:** Sgt. Paul Cox

- North West Copeland

**1<sup>st</sup> public meeting** - no speaker – local issues discussed

**Home Security:** Age Concern Cath Howard

**Drug awareness:** Maggie Messenger CADAS

**North Cumbria Health Action Zone:** Christine Harrison

**Sept 2002 Community Enterprise – Kris Brennan**

- South Whitehaven

**Grants only meeting. South Whitehaven Partnership:** Denise Raper Regeneration Manager, & Mrs Barber Regeneration Partnership chair.

**Youth Offending Team:** Annabelle Mackie.

**Traffic issues:** Richard Hayward. **SRB Projects in Kells area**

**South Whitehaven Partnership:** Denise Raper

**Groundwork West Cumbria – work in South Whitehaven:** Greame Ives

as, "I've really enjoyed that meeting" or "That was good, when's the next one?" are not uncommon. Words to the effect of, "If forums did not exist, we would have to invent them" have also been used.

The Joint Neighbourhood Forums partnership between Copeland Borough Council and Cumbria County Council is currently the only such example of joint working in Cumbria and as such is often quoted as an example of good practice. It has now been in operation for seventeen months and still in its infancy. Given the continued support of both partners, the Forums partnership will grow into a robust and effective example of community consultation and participation that, in turn, will help to ensure strong community action and spirit within Copeland.

16.8.02

