

REPORT TO:	FULL COUNCIL	AGENDA ITEM: 9
DATE OF MEETING:	4th NOVEMBER 2021	CATEGORY RECOMMENDED
REPORT FROM:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	CHRIS SMITH, COMMUNITIES TEAM MANAGER	DOC:
SUBJECT:	AREA FORUM MEETINGS	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL WARDS	TERMS OF REFERENCE: HCS07

1.0 Recommendation

- 1.1 That Area Forums be held as virtual non-constituted community meetings, on a trial basis, until the financial year end in April 2022.

2.0 Purpose of the Report

- 2.1 To seek Council approval to two rounds of meetings in November/ December 2021 and March/ April 2022 being undertaken as non-constituted community meetings on a trial basis.
- 2.2 To inform Council of the intention to carry out a review of the meetings after this time to gauge participation levels and feedback from attendees which will inform a further discussion on the future of the meetings beyond this date.

4.0 Detail

- 4.1 The Council's six Area Forums have operated in their current format since the Safer Neighbourhood Forum and Council Area Forum merged into one meeting in 2018.
- 4.2 Prior to Covid19, the Area Forum meetings would take place in community venues three times per year. The meetings are attended by District and Parish Councillors, members of public, interested parties, Community and Voluntary Sector Organisations including the South Derbyshire CVS, Council Officers and the local Police Safer Neighbourhood Teams.
- 4.3 The meetings have a set agenda and are chaired by appointed District Councillors.
- 4.4 Due to the ongoing Covid pandemic, which meant that it was not possible to hold meetings in community venues, the meetings took place via Microsoft Teams in January 2021.
- 4.5 The six virtual meetings were largely successful and although numbers were slightly down on the previous round of face-to-face meetings, they were well attended despite not being extensively advertised.

- 4.6 Due to the Government's ruling earlier this year which stated that constituted Council meetings could not take place virtually, it was agreed to postpone the summer round of meetings as the pandemic meant there was still a risk associated with returning to face-to-face meetings in small community venues.
- 4.7 Although it may now be possible to return to face-to-face public meetings, Covid numbers in the District continue to rise and given the nature of the venues at which these meeting take place it is considered that there is , there is still some risk associated with holding meetings face to face and the Council could not guarantee the safety of participants. There are also clear environmental benefits with holding the meetings virtually.
- 4.8 Whilst the meetings cannot, under current legislation operate as constituted meeting, they could operate as an informal Community meetings subject to no formal voting taking..
- 4.9 Derbyshire Police has confirmed their willingness to attend the meetings virtually, as have South Derbyshire CVS who regularly provide updates at the meeting.
- 4.10 After the two rounds of virtual meetings, it is planned to review the meetings to see how many people have attended and to gauge opinion from attendees on whether they find the virtual meetings are successful.
- 4.11 The meetings will be extensively publicised, using press releases, social media, Parish Councils and other partner organisations to promote the meetings.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications with making the meetings virtual on a trial basis.

6.0 Corporate Implications

- 6.1 The meetings will not be able to operate as constituted meetings, formal minutes will not be taken and no voting decisions will be made exclusively by District Councilors.
- 6.2 The existing nominated Chair's will continue in the role until the Full Council meeting in May when new Chair's will be appointed.

Corporate Plan Implications

- 6.3 The Council's Corporate Plan aims to ensure that the local community is fully engaged in what the Council's priorities are and maintaining a well-attended and informative program of community meetings is key to the Council's success

Risk Impact

- 6.4 Holding the meetings virtually removes any potential Covid 19 risks associated with holding meetings face to face.

7.0 Community Impact

7.1 There may be some individuals that are not computer savvy or do not have the required hardware or software to enable them to access the meetings via Microsoft Teams. On the other hand, holding the meetings virtually enables access to the meetings to some people who may be unable or unwilling to travel to some of the remote venues in the dark. This is especially relevant during winter months in inclement weather.

8.0 Conclusions

Holding the meetings virtually will provide environmental benefits and could potentially attract new attendees to the forums. The two rounds of virtual meetings will provide an opportunity to try and increase public participation and the subsequent review will provide information so that a decision can be made on the future format of the meetings.

9.0 Background Papers

Attendance figures	Oct/Nov 2019	Jan/Feb 2020	Jan/Feb 2021
Area 1 Etwall	20	19	13
Area 2 Repton	27	24	19
Area 3 Melbourne	22	23	24
Area 4 Swadlincote	34	37	24
Area 5 Newhall	27	35	21
Area 6 Linton	36	48	21