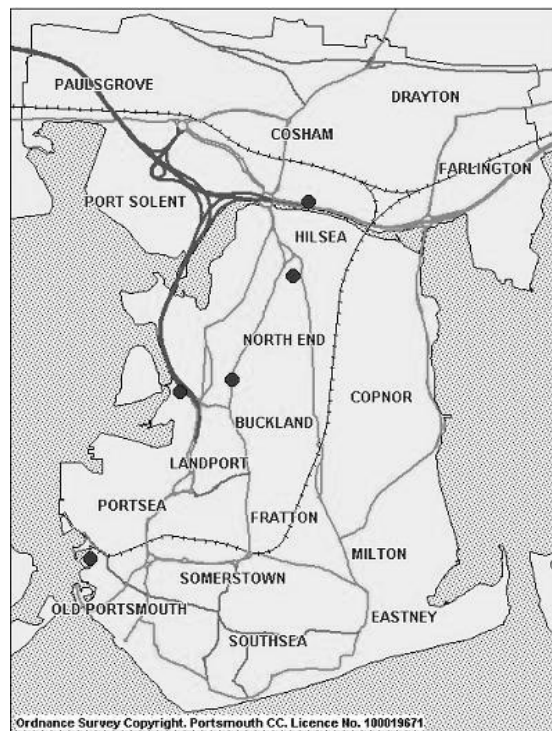


# Neighbourhood Forums in Portsmouth

## Outline paper



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## Neighbourhood Forums

Portsmouth City Council established neighbourhood forums in 1992 as a way to ensure local input, consult on Council services and provide opportunities for people to have their say.

*“The aims and objectives of these forums have been to bring together local people to discuss local issues, and to provide the City Council with a sounding board on matters of topical concern”*

-Article 10, PCC Constitution.

18 years on, the forums have a mixed record and there is a clear need to review the form and function of these bodies in relation to the Council's wider community engagement and decision-making activity.

Key issues include:

### **Accessibility & Attendance**

Forum meetings are routinely held in the evening (typically after 7pm). Average attendance is of between 30-50 people. Those in attendance do not reflect the demographic make-up of the City. Meetings are held in community venues (usually school or church buildings)- but crucially “off-peak”.

### **Membership and appointment**

Each neighbourhood forum currently has its own constitution and adheres to a code of practice. Forum constitutions provide for a Chair, a steering committee and the general conduct of business. Whilst these have been independently established over time, they have no basis in the Council's constitution<sup>1</sup>. Forum AGMs appoint key personnel from those present at that particular meeting, often in isolation of the wider community and elected members.

### **Consultative vs. Decision-making**

There is a key distinction to be made between representative and participatory function. Forums have no delegated powers or budgets and as such are consultative in nature. They are given no formal voting remit by the City Council and cannot ratify or veto any of its decisions. Whilst the focus of forum activity is predominately consultative there is a perception that forums can make formal decisions. Business is often conducted in an overly formal committee style and with regular “votes” and “recommendations” made “in quorum”.

There is, therefore, a need for greater clarity in the remit of forums to ensure that there is a clearer interface with the Council's decision-making structure- in particular Full Council, Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny. As developed channels of community opinion forums could more effectively support and inform the ward role of Councillors.

### **Coterminosity**

There are currently 14 forums across the City, based on “historic” communities. These boundaries are not coterminous with the Council's 14 electoral wards or any other geographical units applied by partner agencies. This creates a disconnect between the Councillors' ward role, resident identification and the wider area. Current forum areas bi-sect wards and demand multiple attendance by Councillors. Whilst

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<sup>1</sup> Article 10 (p.35), Portsmouth City Council Constitution.

electoral and service area boundaries are not natural identifiers they offer the potential of helping to plan the management and support of the forum process.

### **Response and Support**

Forum activity is currently supported by Link Officers drawn from across the Council's service areas. They undertake their duties in addition to their full time post. There is at present limited capacity for Link Officers to move beyond the logistics of individual meetings. There is a need to make clearer links to the corporate centre and generate greater buy-in from heads of service and directors in supporting the neighbourhood dimension of Council services. Furthermore, a clearer "journey of engagement" needs to be developed to ensure that residents raising an issue at a forum are responded to and that requests are effectively tracked. Better signposting of Council services would avert an over concentration on individual case matters in public forum and free-up discussion time.

This outline paper, therefore, seeks to assert the following three principles in its proposals for change:

#### **Relevance**

Ensure that activity is relevant to the increasingly busy lives of our citizens and the growing diversity of our local population.

#### **Accessibility**

Use a variety of venues and methods within each neighbourhood- to take consultation activity to where people are.

#### **An action orientated approach**

Develop a robust process for capturing issues and feeding back with considered responses within realistic timescales.

## **Purpose**

Neighbourhood Forums should:

- Allow for focused discussion on issues of concern and aspirations for the local neighbourhood.
- Enable open and interactive discussions.
- Be supported by local volunteers and community activists.
- Provide a contact point for the wider circle of community groups and associations.
- Be facilitated and supported by the Council in a way that is appropriate to their individual needs.
- Help to improve the design and delivery of local services.
- Connect clearly to local ward Councillors.
- Enhance the consultation activities of partner agencies.

## **Function**

Neighbourhood Forums should:

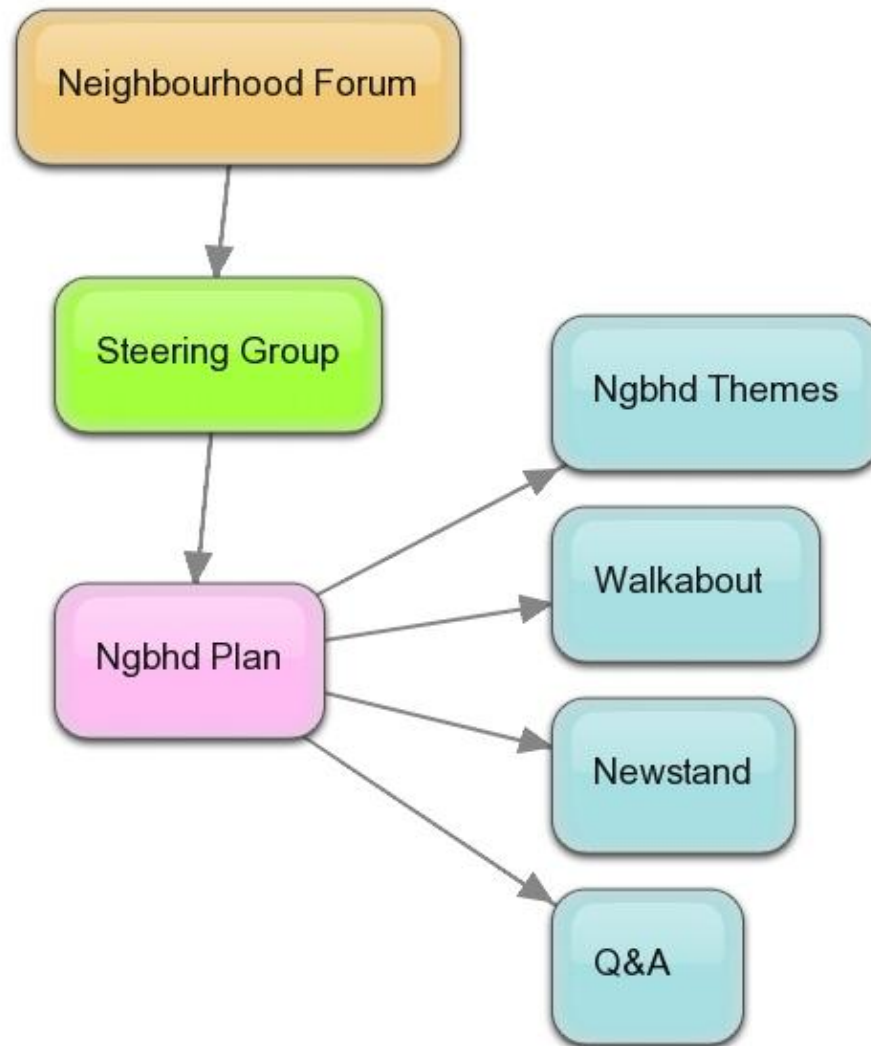
- Plan a range of activities that provide for a variety of groups and interests within the neighbourhood area to have their say.
- Have dedicated support from the Council in choosing and planning a range of activities.
- Develop an annual plan- reviewed quarterly that highlights opportunities for consultation and identifies key issues.
- Acknowledge communities of identity, geography and interest.
- Make use of public space at times convenient to residents.

## **Suggested new model**

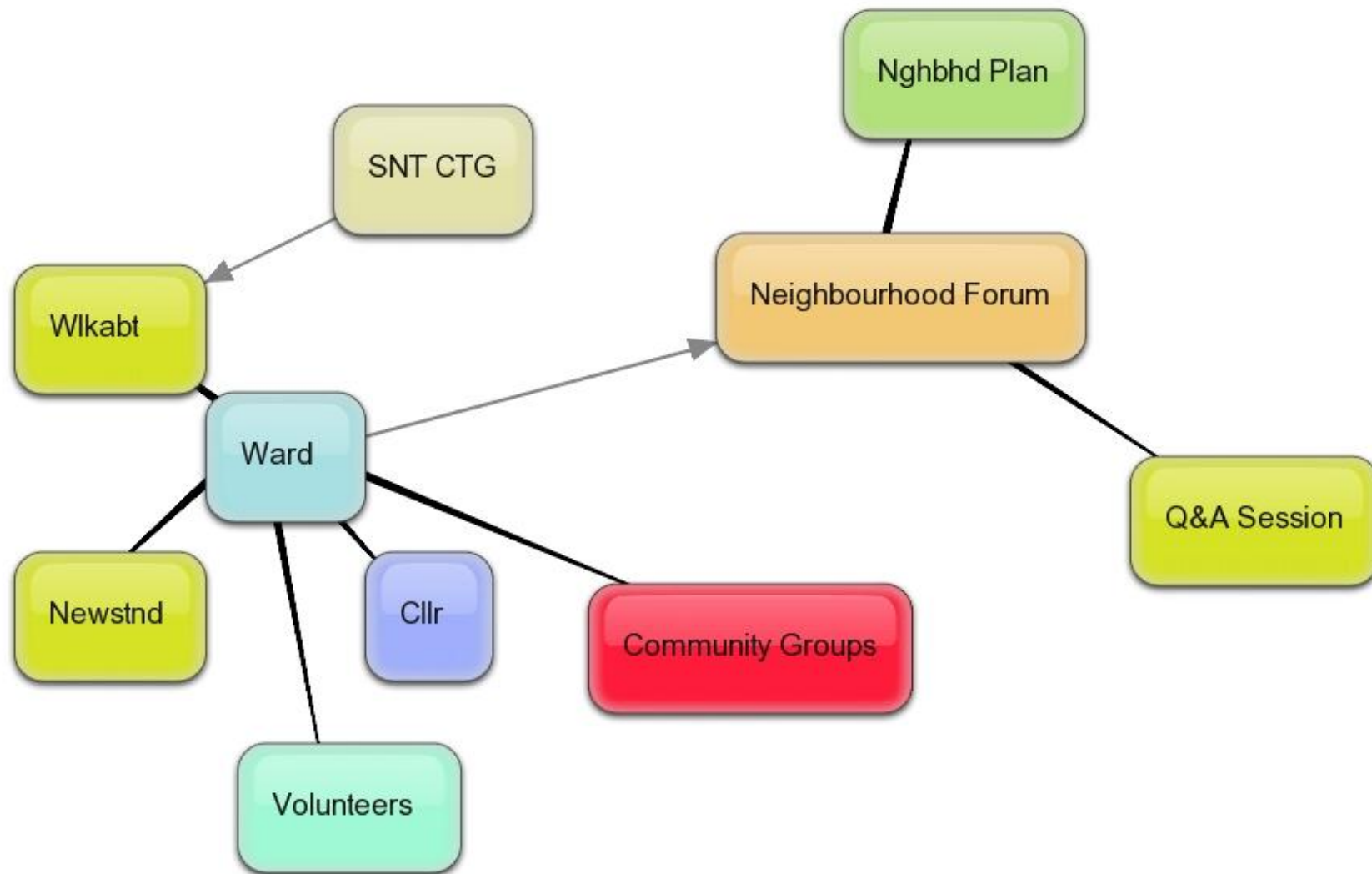
This paper recommends that a wider discussion around current forum boundaries is not considered at this stage. It prioritises the trialling of a new model to refresh the Council's consultation activity. Any future boundary review would have to be balanced with an assessment of the Council's ability to resource wider change within the current economic climate and any potential delegation or devolution of responsibilities from the corporate centre.

The new model attempts to build on the independence of existing forums and maintain their role in providing valuable community intelligence. It proposes a flexible framework for neighbourhood consultation that will allow for local differentiation as well as clearer pathways to Council decision-making and services.

An explanation of each diagram is within the tables below.



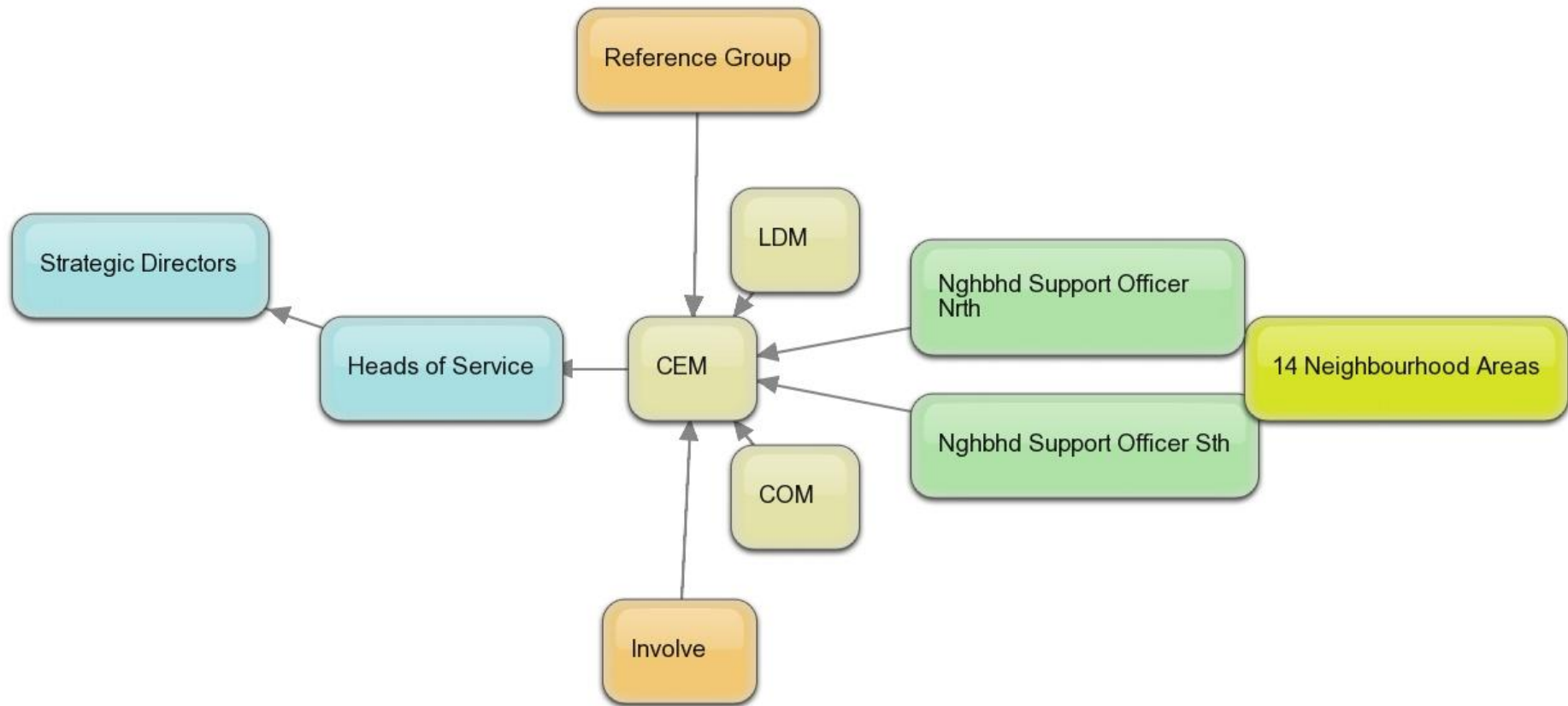
## (1) Neighbourhood Model Overview



Notes:  
SNT CTG- Safer Neighbourhoods Community Tasking Group

Draft Outline Document

## (2) Neighbourhood and Ward Level Functions



Notes:  
 CEM- Communities Engagement Manager  
 COM- Communications Officer  
 LDM- Local Democracy Manager

### (3) Neighbourhood Support Framework

Body	Role
<b>Neighbourhood Forum</b>	<p>Open public meeting to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Discuss themes and issues across the neighbourhood.</li> <li>○ Identify community needs.</li> <li>○ Outline aspirations for area.</li> </ul> <p>These meetings will be facilitated by local volunteers and supported by the Nghbhd Officer and Head of Service. They are open to all. Feedback and actions will be progressed by the Nghbhd Officer.</p>
<b>Steering Group</b>	<p>Comprises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Local volunteers</li> <li>○ Councillors</li> <li>○ Members of other local groups and associations.</li> <li>○ Police Community Task Group representative.</li> </ul> <p>A small focused group to consider the main themes of activity and agree the Neighbourhood Plan.</p>
<b>Neighbourhood Plan</b>	<p>The plan will be a short document that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Maps out a <b>baseline of 4 consultation activities per year</b> (one a quarter).</li> <li>○ Captures the main issues of interest for the area.</li> <li>○ Identifies partner agencies and personnel relevant to the neighbourhood.</li> </ul>
<b>Walkabout</b>	<p>A <b>ward focused</b> consultation activity that invites residents and businesses to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Consider their surrounding area via a “<b>walking meeting</b>” along an agreed route.</li> <li>○ Identify “snagging” and street scene issues.</li> <li>○ Build community confidence and awareness through sociable activity.</li> <li>○ Work in alliance with Safer Portsmouth Partnership <b>Community Tasking Groups</b>.</li> </ul> <p>Identified issues will be captured in an “action sheet” which will contribute to the Nghbhd Plan and feedback to attendees.</p>
<b>Newstand</b>	<p>An opportunity to obtain wider views of the local community as well as promote a particular Council service or project. These activities will involve 2 personnel (e.g. one officer and a volunteer) setting up a “stall” in some of the following suggested venues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Supermarket/Shopping Centre</li> <li>○ Pub</li> <li>○ Church</li> <li>○ University Union</li> </ul>



<b>Q&amp;A</b>	<p>A public meeting to allow residents to ask questions around particular issues or planned projects. These would allow:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Council Officer Presentations</li> <li>○ Councillor feedback on issues and activities</li> <li>○ Service consultations</li> </ul> <p>These sessions could be chaired by volunteers from the steering groups or by invited guests (e.g. Members of the Youth Parliament). Q&amp;A sessions could be held in a variety of venues and don't have to be fixed to traditional meeting locations.</p>
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<b>Support Roles</b>	
<b>Strategic Director</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identify and link neighbourhood issues at a strategic level</li> </ul>
<b>Head of Service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Monitor actions within designated neighbourhood area</li> <li>○ Take ownership of key issues and resolve disputes</li> <li>○ Feedback to corporate centre via DMT</li> </ul>
<b>Communities Engagement Manager</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Oversee Forums process</li> <li>○ Develop trail activity and framework</li> <li>○ Join up outputs</li> <li>○ Manage co-ordination groups</li> </ul>
<b>Local Democracy Manager</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Link to overview &amp; scrutiny</li> <li>○ Link to member development</li> <li>○ Advise on petition procedure</li> <li>○ Flag opportunities to influence</li> </ul>
<b>Communications Officer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Co-ordinate and develop publicity for activities</li> <li>○ Support design of neighbourhood plan</li> <li>○ Ensure consistent, corporate approach to publications and branding</li> </ul>
<b>Neighbourhood Forum Officer (1) North (1) South</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Support the day-to-day logistics of forum activity</li> <li>○ Contact point for information- improve signposting of services for residents</li> <li>○ Progress arising actions</li> <li>○ Support development of neighbourhood plan</li> <li>○ Support Reference Group</li> </ul>
<b>Reference Group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Comprised of former Link Officers and former Chairs/committee members</li> <li>○ Advise on forward approach and development</li> <li>○ Feed in community intelligence</li> </ul>
<b>Involve Group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To consider forums in relation to wider engagement activity</li> <li>○ To assume the role of the reference group following successful trail via focused agenda items</li> </ul>

## Response and feedback

Activity	Approach	Response
<b>Walkabout</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Visual record of problems- Photos and Snagging List</li> <li>○ “Three Things” feedback card</li> <li>○ Issues collated and fed into Nghbhd Plan</li> <li>○ Officer email contact and referral to City helpdesk</li> <li>○ Cllr involvement- appointments/surgery signpost</li> </ul>	<p>Feedback summary of walkabout to every participant via email</p> <p>Issues and Actions</p>
<b>Newstand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ On-line referral via laptop</li> <li>○ Officer email contact and referral to City helpdesk</li> <li>○ “Three Things” feedback card</li> <li>○ Ward leaflet</li> </ul>	<p>Signposting and promotion of service consultation.</p> <p>Face to face exercise.</p>
<b>Q&amp;A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Structured Q&amp;A session open to the public</li> <li>○ Received Q’s and from the floor</li> <li>○ Presentation from Council Officers (limited to one per session)</li> </ul>	<p>Summarised for Ngh Forum Bulletin &amp; web</p> <p>Local Radio coverage</p>
<b>Theme Meeting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Discussion facilitated by local volunteers and supported by Nghbhd Officer</li> <li>○ Interactive</li> <li>○ Audience polls</li> </ul>	<p>Key themes are adopted in the Neighbourhood Plan</p>

## Links to Service Areas, Partner Agencies and other Groups

The aim of the new model is to provide a flexible framework through which established community groups and associations can connect better to the engagement and decision-making arms of the Council. These include:

- Tenants Participation Groups
- Community Boards (such as those in Landport & Buckland)
- Housing Associations
- Residents Associations
- Historical societies and issue groups
- Voluntary sector groups (supported through Community First)

The new model of Neighbourhood Forum activity is designed to complement and support the **Community Tasking Groups** developed by Hampshire Police and delivered through the Safer Portsmouth Partnership (SPP). The Tasking Groups are divided into four areas Cosham, Fratton, Central and Southsea, which cover the whole of the City. Furthermore, community beats have distinct routes, which cross over Council ward and neighbourhood boundaries. There is, however, close synergy

between the aims of the tasking groups and the proposed forum activities (especially walkabouts).

### **Further ideas**

Each neighbourhood could adopt a **Charter**, which would map out its objectives and code of practice. The charter would highlight opportunities for engagement and provide residents with a comprehensive list of what they can expect from the forum activity. It would also outline how forums can influence and recommend with reference to the wider Council structure.

Overview & Scrutiny could initiate a **Neighbourhood Level Scrutiny** exercise to look at a specific street or area. This could provide snapshot of the issues experienced and check the performance of services in real-time. This could be developed along the lines of the planned Health Scrutiny project examining Alcohol related admissions.

DCLG has recently consulted on the process and effectiveness of **Petitions** within local authorities with a view to enacting a new process within the next 12 months. Whilst we would not seek to increase the volume of petitions received by the council, the forums have a clear role in helping to outline a framework for their receipt and communicating the response.

### **Ideas from other places**

Local authorities across England have developed a number of approaches to neighbourhood consultation and management. It is important that although there are commonalities, each is relevant to the specific local context. The following examples are useful for this outline:

#### **Manchester “Ward Co-ordination”**

Manchester City Council has developed a ward Co-ordination scheme that aims to deliver services tailored to local areas. Each ward has a ward coordinator and ward support officer, whose role it is to improve Council and other public services for local residents.

Ward plans set out a three-year strategy (key objectives, targets and priorities are reviewed annually) that take into account main ward issues and the role of public agencies in addressing them.

Ward newsletters are sent to residents twice a year and set out performance in each ward, targets for improvement and progress against the plan. The Newsletters also invite residents’ responses and comments on services.

Ward Co-ordinators take on the role in addition to existing work, they progress ward plans and newsletters, manage local consultations and act as a contact point for residents and Councillors. A Ward Co-ordination Group reviews local services and joint working.

*From Manchester.gov.uk*

### **Sandwell “Neighbourhood and Town Tasking”**

Over the last three years Sandwell has experienced a significant reduction in recorded crime. Despite this success, incidents of anti-social behaviour and environmental crimes in particular continue to raise the public’s concern about their neighbourhoods.

Sandwell’s three-tier tasking model focuses on action to address ‘here and now’ problems. The model has also been designed to make sure agencies and services work more closely with local people to provide reassurance and confidence.

The main objectives of the tasking arrangements are to:

- ensure each town and neighbourhood has an effective multi-agency tasking group
- take action on public concerns and priorities identified through consultation events and reports of anti-social behaviour made to the council, police and other agencies
- resolve at least one local community problem per neighbourhood cluster per month
- inform the public who their local neighbourhood team are, and how they can contact them
- feed back to the public on how well their local neighbourhood team is doing in tackling crime and antisocial behaviour and creating cleaner and stronger communities through monthly neighbourhood forums

Sandwell is subdivided into 79 naturally defined neighbourhoods. With the development of neighbourhood tasking, and for the purposes of allocating resources, these neighbourhoods have been grouped into a series of 31 ‘clusters’. Neighbourhood cluster teams liaise and contact each other on a weekly basis in order to progress actions agreed at town tasking meetings, share local intelligence and respond to immediate problems that have recently surfaced. Neighbourhood cluster teams also ensure that local people are involved in the process of identifying and bringing forward signal events and local community problems.

Each of Sandwell’s six towns has a tasking group that meets every two weeks. The lead officers for each of the town tasking meetings are the police sector inspector and the relevant town team coordinator. They have joint responsibility for chairing the meeting and coordinating the delivery of interventions. The chair and vice chairs of town committees also attend.

*From IDeA.gov.uk*

## **Wolverhampton “Local Area and Neighbourhood Arrangements” (LANA)**

The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) committed to using the idea of neighbourhood management as a means to change the way in which public services are delivered in a neighbourhood through a process of “getting local communities and local services providers to work together”. The strategy identified 85 natural neighbourhoods in the city. Statistical profiles for each neighbourhood were developed and utilised to identify 29 priority neighbourhoods (Wolverhampton Partnership 2002). From this, six neighbourhood clusters were agreed which formed the basis for neighbourhood management pilots in the city. Each pilot area was managed by a different lead agency which included voluntary and statutory sector providers and had a small staff team with a neighbourhood manager in place to lead the team locally. LANA was funded through a combination of NRF and city council funding.

A governance framework was established and endorsed by all partners to provide a broad consistency to the governance in each neighbourhood. This governance includes a Local Neighbourhood Partnership (LNP) comprising residents, service providers and elected members. The LNP, supported by their staff team, have responsibility for developing a neighbourhood action plan, outlining the key community priorities and any issues highlighted by data for the area and issues from local service providers. These priorities, where appropriate, are also linked to LAA targets to ensure that the contribution of neighbourhood working to the LAA can be demonstrated. The actions in the plans are jointly identified and agreed by service providers, elected members and residents to form a three year programme of activity. The neighbourhood action plan provides the key vehicle for communities to influence service provision within the neighbourhoods.

Elected members develop the visions and priorities within neighbourhoods and also ensure that council services respond effectively to the needs identified within the plans.

Identified key benefits from neighbourhood working for councillors including:

- A structured and enhanced insight into the needs and aspirations of the neighbourhood and its residents
- A structure through which to address community cohesion issues. This has included work involving a range of communities as well as inter-generational work - a key issue in the city
- A route to greater involvement/empowerment for residents and increased democratic accountability. Councillors have been key in promoting greater involvement in LNPs and in promoting campaigns such as community noticeboards to promote further engagement/empowerment
- A balanced view of what the community as a whole needs and of what residents would like to see happen in their neighbourhood in the future
- An ongoing link to, and influence over, other non-council services including the police and primary care trust.

*From IDeA.gov.uk*

## Next Steps

This initial paper is designed to provide an outline of issues the Council needs to consider in taking forward its review of neighbourhood forums.

The process of review is as follows:

Month	Action
<b>March 2010</b>	Circulate to SDB for initial thoughts and feedback.  Circulate amongst senior management and those consulted at preparation stage.  Discuss role of forums and links to existing activity with Involve Group and All Forums Group.
<b>April</b>	Meetings with existing Forum Chairs to further refine and develop the suggest model.
<b>May</b>	Circulate to Leader & Group Leaders & Key Portfolios/Shadow following Election.
<b>June/July</b>	Seek cross-party agreement via Constitutional Working Group
<b>August</b>	Finalise model and prepare transition plan. Appoint new posts (if approved)
<b>September</b>	Start trialling new model
<b>January 2011 (Q4)</b>	New Neighbourhood Forum Process in Place
Quarterly review	