

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: BELLSHILL AND DISTRICT AREA COMMITTEE	Subject: MEETING WITH BELLSHILL AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY FORUM
From: LIAISON DIRECTOR	
Date: 8 MAY 2000	Ref: RM/MF

1. **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Area Committee on discussions with Community Forum members in relation to re-establishing links and effective communication between the two.

2. **BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 At the Bellshill and District Area Committee meeting of 23 March 2000 members considered a report by the Liaison Director and approved a recommendation that the Community Forum be engaged in order to consider re-establishment in light of the Forums decision to postpone meetings until Area Committees were re-established.

3. **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

- 3.1 A meeting was held between representatives of the community services department and 6 community forum representatives on Thursday 4 May 2000.
- 3.2 Amongst the items discussed were forum membership, including the need to consider new members, the forum constitution, regularity of meetings, relationship with the Bellshill and District Area Committee and in particular, clarity on the role of the Community Forum.
- 3.3 Community Forum members have agreed, in light of the number of Forum members in attendance at the meeting of 4 May, that the most pressing issue was to clarify whether those individuals who were nominated as Forum representatives previously were still in a position to participate.
- 3.4 The Forum requested that the Liaison Director write to all Forum representatives requesting confirmation of the situation with regards to membership. A timescale for responding has been set as Friday 26 May. A second meeting of the Forum has been set for Thursday 15 June. Forum representatives in attendance agreed that should the response to the letter indicate a number of gaps in Forum membership, then the Liaison Director should place a public notice in the local press inviting potential new members to the meeting of 15 June. A copy is attached as appendix 1.
- 3.5 Forum members have also requested that the Liaison Director produce a guidance note on the role of the Community Forum as a discussion point for the meeting on 15 June. This is attached as appendix 2.
- 3.6 As a result of the meeting on 15 June it is intended to present a further report to the Area Committee updating members on the position with Forum membership.

4. **RECOMMENDATION**

4.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- (a) request that the Liaison Director produce a report to the next Area Committee with an update on the re-establishment of the Bellshill and District Community Forum
- (b) otherwise note the content of this report.



Liaison Director

**Department of Community Services
Community Resources Division**

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Appendix 1

Jim McGuinness, Head of Community Resources

*Director of Community Services
Paul Jukes*

Our Ref	CS001/041/030	Contact	Robert McHarg
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To All Members
Bellshill Community Forum

Dear Colleague

BELLSHILL AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY FORUM

As you may be aware a meeting of the above group took place on Thursday 4 May 2000, in Bellshill Academy.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the re-establishment of the community forum in light of the recent decision to re-establish the Bellshill and District area committee. The forum had previously agreed to postpone meetings until the area committee was re-established. A number of matters were discussed at the meeting including, the purpose of the forum, the relationship with the area committee, the draft constitution as developed previously, future agenda items and finances for the forum. The most pressing matter discussed related to forum membership. It was noted that only half of those who had previously been elected as community forum representatives were in attendance or had given apologies for the meeting.

It was felt by those present that it was important to confirm the present situation in relation to community forum membership prior to discussing, in any detail, other issues.

To this end I would be obliged if you would complete the attached pro-forma, which asks you to indicate whether you are in a position to continue as a community forum representative, and return it in the envelope provided by Friday 26 May 2000.

I have attached for your information a note of the meeting of 4 May 2000.

If you have any questions relating to this meeting, the enclosed pro-forma, the community forum or the area committee, please do not hesitate to contact the officer named above.

Yours sincerely

Paul Jukes
Liaison Director.

BELLSHILL AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY FORUM

REPRESENTATIVE'S PRO-FORMA

Please use this form to indicate whether you are able to continue as a representative of the Bellshill and District community forum.

Name of Representative:

Address:

PLEASE TICK AS APPROPRIATE:

I am able to continue as a representative of the Bellshill and District community forum

I am no longer in a position to continue as a representative of the Bellshill and District community forum

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

Department of Community Services

Establishing Community Forums – Guidance Note

Introduction

The purpose of this note is to help develop guidance from the department of community services regarding the establishment of community forums. Guidance is available on the basis that: -

- Responsibility for establishing community forums and developing effective working relationships with them rests with area committees;
- Forums should be developed in accordance with the terms of the Decentralisation Scheme and the principles approved each area committee; and
- There will be different outcomes in different areas and there is no blueprint for community forums – they are community structures and it is not for the council alone to decide their composition and role.

There are other sources of expertise within the council on developing effective community participation and other sources of knowledge regarding community organisations and policies in local areas.

The Principles and Aims of Community Forums

The Decentralisation Scheme describes community forums as bringing together representatives from a range of community organisations to help identify local issues, improve local services and enable local action. The forums are described as a key mechanism for community representatives to raise issues and influence decisions. Once established community forums and area committees will negotiate working arrangements and effective communication links.

All area committees have approved an outline approach to establishing community forums and adopted a set of principles governing the operation of community forums.

1. Community forums will not be the only mechanism for consultation and involvement in decision making
2. In working to establish community forums the council recognises that existing community structures should not be ignored or replaced
3. Membership of forums should be wide to avoid domination by any one interest group
4. Adequate and appropriate training and servicing and support be on offer to forums
5. Forums are community structures and it is for communities to decide and review their composition, role and remit
6. Area committees must be able and willing to negotiate with community forums to seek agreement on different issues
7. In dealing with community forums the council will be open, honest and straightforward
8. Area committee members and relevant senior officers in the area will be accessible to community forums

9. The council will respect the views of community forums and listen carefully to observations, ideas, proposals and criticisms
10. The council will recognise the limitations of community forums as representatives of the people within an area but recognise also that community forums can help the council itself become more representative

From these principles a vision for community forums should be developed. This vision will highlight the central role of community involvement in decentralisation and should be shared by all those who have a contribution to make including area committee, community forum members, local people and council officials.

Without a shared vision and agreed aims it will be difficult to develop clear proposals and demonstrate that the council is committed to decentralisation and working in partnership with local people.

Steps to Establishing Community Forums

Given that community forums are local structures to be developed by local people and community representatives it is essential that the council enters into the process of discussion and consultation with local people about how they would wish the community forums to be set up and operated. The following paragraphs provide some suggestions to begin this consultation.

1. **Who to involve from the local communities** – an important initial decision is who to aim to involve from the area. This could be all known community organisations and any interested individuals. Education, social work, housing and community services all have some lists of community organisations. The Administration department maintains an updated list of all community councils. Local elected members are another good source of information about local organisations. A list of those participants who attended the decentralisation consultation meetings last October is also available.
2. **Community forum proposals** - in order to inform and consult with local people regarding decentralisation and community forums, proposals need to be developed which are both clear and presentable and easily understood. Proposals could include some options, questions or issues for discussion regarding the following:-
 - The geographical areas to be included in each community forum;
 - The representation on community forums;
 - Selecting community members to serve on the forums; and,
 - Links between the community forum and both the area committee and wider community.
3. **Informing people and inviting them to participate** – local people and community organisations require introductory information about the aims of decentralisation and the consultation to establish community forums. There are various methods of providing information and most areas will probably select more than one method:-
 - Letters
 - Leaflets
 - Presentations at local meetings
 - Exhibitions
 - Advertisements/press releases

The public relations section of the chief executive's office can advise on contact with the local press.

Such introductory information could also include details about the stages in the consultation process.

4. **Consultation methods** – There are a range of consultation methods which may be adopted including public meetings, surveys, workshops and action planning seminars.

It is most important to remember however that effective consultation does not simply mean imposing a prescribed idea or preferred option upon people. Through discussion people may be given choices and the opportunity to develop a way forward or solution through their own efforts and ideas.

North Lanarkshire Council, seeking to actively consult with local people on the establishment of community forums, is demonstrating its willingness to listen to local people's ideas and views, to respond accordingly and change proposals where necessary and to share the responsibility for developing and organising community forums with local people.

5. **Who to involve from North Lanarkshire Council** – Participants in a consultation exercise will want to hear what is proposed from those who are most directly involved and responsible. This will probably mean a leading role in consultation events for appropriate elected members, liaison directors and area team members. Clearly, it will be crucial that such people are well prepared and very clear about the options and proposals outlined.

Consultation events, like much of the process of developing community involvement, will require skilled facilitators to help people think through what they want and organise themselves to best achieve this.

6. **Other resources** – Before determining a process of developing community forums it will be important to ensure that sufficient skills and resources are available to support each stage. These will include the time of key people, finance, a range of skills, equipment and information

In addition, community forums once established, will require resources in order to operate effectively.

7. **Willingness to change** – Consultation may result in people rejecting the vision, proposals and options presented. Before consulting, consideration should be given to the willingness to review the vision and change proposals if people want something more or something different.