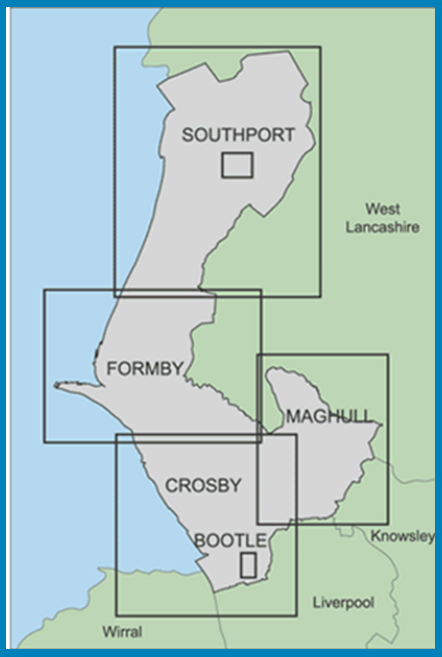
APPENDIX 1

Sefton Council

Consultation Report:

The future of Area Committees in Sefton



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Summary

This report provides a summary of the findings from the consultation and engagement process undertaken to consider whether Area Committees are the most effective way of engaging members of the public in Council business. The consultation dialogue commenced with a report to each of the three Area Committees in December 2015 and January 2016.

Feedback from the Area Committees

A report on the consultation process for the future of Area Committees in Sefton was prepared by the Head of Regulation and Compliance and submitted to the Area Committees for consideration in December 2015 and January 2016. The following comments were made and recorded in the minutes of the meetings:-

Southport Area Committee – 2nd December 2015

Members of the Committee, the Local Advisory Group Member and members of the public raised the following points and asked that they be submitted as part of the consultation process:-

- Where had the report come from? Was it officer or Cabinet Member led? Jill Coule, Head of Regulation and Compliance, indicated that it was a combination of both; that upon inheriting the Democratic Services Team following the Senior Management Review, she was looking at all aspects of her service area including the most effective way of engaging members of the public in Council business; and that the Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services also wanted a review of the matter

- The report is the death knell for Area Committees

- The Area Committee, via the Police Issues item and as acknowledged by the Southport Police Inspectors, was a very effective and active way for the public to engage with the Police

- Meetings of the Cabinet are over very quickly. Could Cabinet meetings be held in the evening at Southport to enable members of the public to attend and ask questions if Area Committees are wound up

- Cabinet decisions are decided before the meeting and no debate takes place; and yet Cabinet meetings have to be attended by a host of senior officers that was a great expense to the Council. However, at Southport Area Committee, issues of local concern are frequently debated and Southport residents are in attendance to hear such debates

- Paragraph 1.1 of the report was incorrect because initially 9 Area Committees were established with three in Southport. The establishment of the current Southport Area Committee was the result of a referendum held in 2004 and this was not referred to in the report

- Southport Area Committee serves a “real” community as opposed to Central Sefton Area Committee which is large and unwieldy comprising of three separate and unconnected communities

- The loss of Southport Area Committee would lead to a centralisation of power at the expense of Southport’s local communities

- The proposals would be another nail in the coffin for Southport

- This is a devolution issue. Southport is being drawn south towards Liverpool resulting in a loss of local accountability for local residents

- Southport Area Committee was well attended by local residents in comparison to the other two Area Committees

- The proposal to cease Southport Area Committee should be resisted as it is an excellent Area Committee

- The reality was that the political decision had already been taken elsewhere

- The cessation of Southport Area Committee would lead to marginal savings that would have a disproportionate negative effect on the public

- There was a case for devolution in Sefton with more delegation of powers to a local level rather than less

- Area Committees may not work well in other areas of Sefton but they had alternative democratic structures in place such as Town/Parish Councils

- If Southport Area Committee was lost so too would be the ability for local people to inform local decisions and spend local money

South Sefton Area Committee – 18th January 2016

Members of the Committee and Local Advisory Group Member raised the following points:-

- Public attendance at South Sefton Area Committee had declined;

- There were a number of methods of communicating with the public such as internet and twitter which were not so well developed when the Area Committees were established;

- Having a larger South Sefton Committee compared to Area Committees covering just two wards did not encourage attendance as the meetings were not as easy to access and covered wider areas of interest;

- Many Members of the Public seemed to be unaware of the meetings;

- The reports in section C of the Agenda may not be of interest to many of the public who might attend;

- Members indicated that the proposed review of Area Committees was timely, and there was a need for consultation with a view to providing a communication and engagement process with the public which reflected current needs and demands.

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Central Sefton Area Committee – 7th January 2016

Members of the Committee and Parish Councillors raised the following points:-

- There were more efficient ways for residents and the community to engage with the Council than the Area Committee;

- The merger of Formby, Crosby and Sefton East Parishes Area Committees into Central Sefton Area Committee(CSAC) created a Committee that was too large and cumbersome and did not serve the community well;

- The public attendance at the Area Committee meetings had steadily fallen;

- Councillors holding public meetings or engaging with residents through their surgery would be more effective and efficient than CSAC;

- Residents could arrange to meet with officers direct – which should be communicated to the public;

- The Public Engagement and Consultation Panel was currently underused;

- The social networking site streetlife.com was an effective method of public engagement, but should not be used for political views;

- The size of Central Sefton Area Committee has led to a lack of engagement;
.
- Queries were raised about the functions of CSAC and if they were assimilated into other Council Committees, how would residents raise questions and queries – i.e. would they have to raise a petition for every query they had;

- The majority of discussions held this evening were really Ward or surgery issues and this was typical;

- The cessation of Area Committees was the removal of public contact and engagement;

- Area Committees were still a useful way of engaging with the public;

- Any re-structure of Area Committees would necessarily have to be at a more local level;

- The previous Area Committee structure was more effective and based at a local level;

- Area Committees had somewhat lost their way, they were created as a tool to counter-balance the Cabinet's power, however, with so few decisions being "called in" they were struggling to find a role to fulfil;

- Individual Wards could call meetings at Ward/Town level;
.
- There was currently a gap between CSAC's aspirations and abilities;

- Few questions were asked in the Public Forum which suggested that residents were not aware of the Committee's existence;

- Any future structure would necessarily have to be a diminution of the existing structure into manageable groups of people;

- The Police attendance at CSAC and their reports and presentations were beneficial, but this could be achieved through alternative means/structures; and

- There were large issues surrounding Sefton's public engagement. A sophisticated strategy should be developed.

The Consultation & Engagement Plan

A consultation and engagement plan was considered by the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel in January 2016, with the aim to consider whether Area Committees are the most effective way of engaging with members of the public for Council business.

The consultation considered:-

- What is the current awareness of Area Committees
- Functions of the Area Committees
- How people currently engage with the Council and Councillors
- How people can engage with the Council and Councillors in the future (if Area Committees no longer exist)
- What are the barriers that people experience in engaging with the Council
- Any suggestions for improvement

The consultation and engagement process took place over an eight week period from 1st February to 31st March and included a wide range of methods including an on-line survey, community events and street surveys. In total, in excess of 230 people engaged with the process. There were some common themes that repeatedly emerged during the pre-consultation dialogue and the consultation and engagement process:

- Southport Area Committee is well attended by local residents and local people raise issues

- South Sefton and Central Area Committees' public attendance has declined following the merger of Area Committees; creating committees that are too large

- Having devolved structures was important, including ward based structures

- The police attendance at meetings and their reports are beneficial but some thought that they could be achieved through alternative means and structures

- Generally, members of the public are not aware of Area Committee meetings and the Ward Councillors and their surgeries. Dates of meetings and surgeries should be widely advertised

- Whilst respondents are generally not aware of Area Committees, an expressed interest to retain them was given as a way of members of the public being able to raise issues and to engage with the council and councillors

- The highest response to keep the Area Committees came from respondents in the Southport area and the highest response to not keep them was from the South Sefton area.

- If the Area Committees didn't exist, the preferred methods respondents indicated that they would use to contact the Council would be direct contact with their ward councillor or MP, telephone, email or a visit to the One Stop Shop. The methods differed according to age group

- Some common barriers to raising issues and talking to the Council and Councillors include not getting a response and responses taking a long time and information on the website not being up to date.

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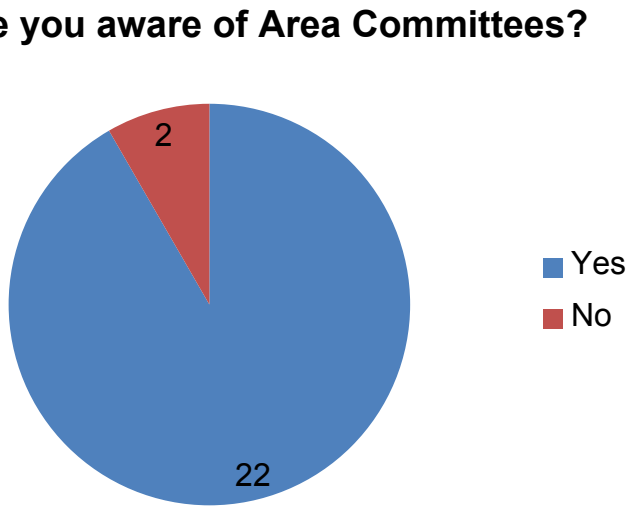
Key findings from the on-line survey

The survey on e-consult was completed by 24 people. The survey included 7 questions:-

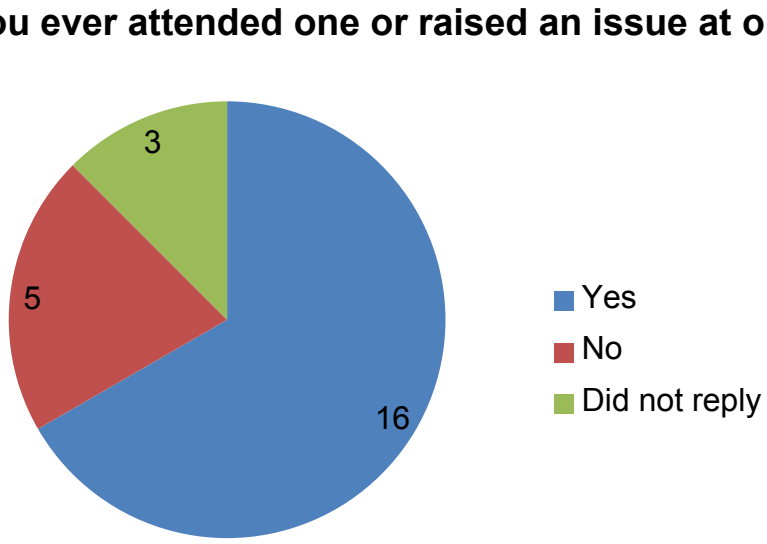
1. Are you aware of Area Committees?

22 (92%) of those who completed the survey were aware of Area Committees whilst 2 (8%) were not



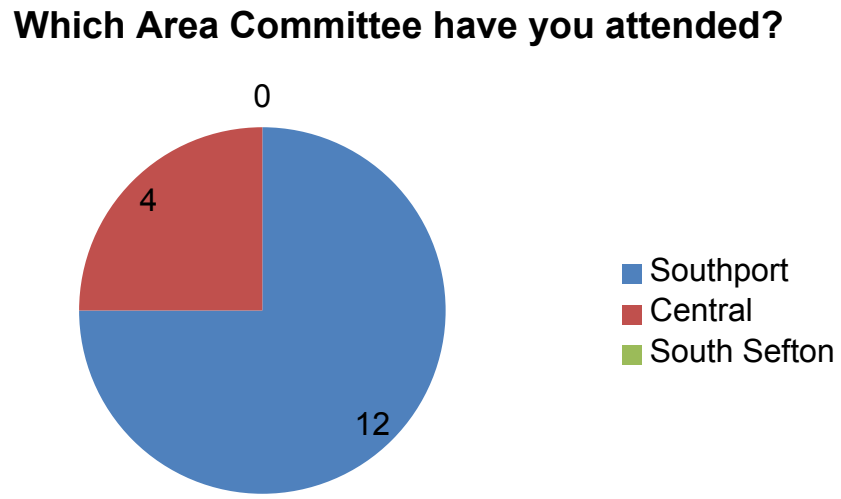
2. Have you ever attended one or raised an issue at one?

16 people (67%) had attended an Area Committee or raised an issue, 5 people hadn't and 3 people didn't post a reply to this question.



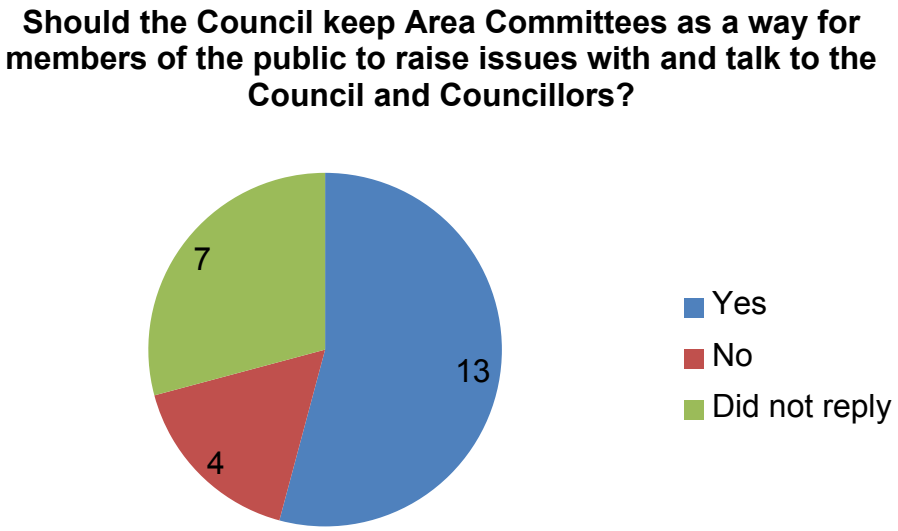
3. Which Area Committee have you attended? (consultees could tick more than one answer if they had attended more than one Area Committee)

12 people indicated that they had attended **Southport Area Committee**, **4** said they had been to **Central Sefton Area Committee** and **nobody** indicated that they had attended the **South Sefton Area Committee**.



4. Should the Council keep Area Committees as a way for members of the public to raise issues with and talk to the Council and Councillors?

13 people (54%) said that yes the Council should keep Area Committees, 4 (17%) said no that they shouldn't be kept and 7 (29%) people did not answer the question



5. What would be your preferred way of raising issues with and talking to the Council and Councillors if Area Committees did not exist?

Respondents were given the opportunity to enter free text in response to this question. These are their comments:-

- At the moment the area committees are too big, the issues in say Formby are totally different from Crosby as are Aintree and Maghull, so having the committee widespread is a waste of time as the elected members can wrongly influence decisions that are not in their remitted area. The area committee in the present format is a waste of time, as the elected members do not take the public opinions seriously and make decisions under the whip usually with the Labour controlled Council influence; hence the reason the Sefton area is slowly but surely creeping into the abyss.

- By telephoning/emailing/or writing to the Chief Executive of Sefton as none of the councillors take any notice or reply very often passing them onto an officer of the Council to reply.

- Email to local councillor

- It would depend on the issue but this could range from simple email to public protest at Council Or Cabinet meetings

- As I had not known about this sort of Committee I would not have attended and did not know I had a way of putting my views across. I have my local Councillors phone number and make contact if I come across a problem but I would prefer to know what goes on rather than read about it too late in the press.

- Another venue to be found and councillors leading on this.

- A group of Councillors who are members of the Cabinet regularly holding Question Time style meetings for the public to raise issues at regular, well-advertised Southport Town Hall sessions. As the Cabinet takes the final decisions they should hold some of their meetings in Southport at which local residents could hear the discussion and how the Cabinet reaches its decisions.

- Writing or e mail

- I want the area committees to continue.

- The Council already has appropriate committees and Council, to which members of the public are entitled to attend. Public question time could and can feature more prominently in existing meetings with no need for added localised meetings.

- Telephone, e-mail, direct approach with Cllrs (if they are ever available)

- Direct contact (letter or e-mail) with a Ward Councillor or Council Department.

- Talking directly to our councillors, however it's a waste of time as Southport councillors are always outvoted

- Email consultation group to consider issues and give opinions. Maybe have AGM?

6. What do you see as the key barriers to raising issues and talking to the Council and Councillors?

These are the comments received from respondents:-

- The main barrier to change is that even if your elected member raises an issue on your behalf it can easily be overruled by the Labour controlled Council, Overview & Scrutiny has no teeth and a waste of time again, as decisions are also made under the whip.

- Queries from residents on the work of the Council are not appreciated and answers are glib and do not answer the concerns raised.

- None.

- Remoteness of Southport from the seat of power plus disinterest by Sefton Councillors to hear the alternative voice of the people of Southport and a political unwillingness to listen to Southport Councillors who strive to represent the people of Southport.

- Not knowing when and where they meet and what local issues are being discussed and how they will affect me or my area.

- None.

- Time and expense involved in travelling from Southport to Bootle where nearly all key council offices are located. No substitute for residents being able to sometimes talk to council officers face to face, particularly planning issues.

- Some people don't have access to computers or do not know how to use them, people do not want to visit other venues, like myself I like to speak directly to a councillor or meeting at my local location, we have already lost enough of our valuable local control.

- A barrier would be if the area committee did not exist.

- Continuing government cuts mean public expectations can't be met.

- Lack of action taken and lack of accountability by members of the council. No one seems to be able to make a decision. Lack of transparency of obtained information on issues. Incoherent information being given.

- A reluctance of Sefton Officers and Cllrs to make themselves available via Q2 above.

- Some Councillors do not respond to e-mail contacts. Council Departments can take exceptionally long periods to respond and then may not deal with the issue raised.

- As previously stated why should councillors from other areas vote down what we want for our area.

- Time and effort to get to the Committee meetings.

7. Do you have any other views or comments?

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Respondents were given the opportunity to make any additional comments about Area Committees or engaging with the Council and Councillors. These are their comments:

- The state of Crosby Village is atrocious, there is little to no investment going to Crosby and Formby, even Maghull and Aintree for that matter, it is all centred in Bootle and Southport Why not get rid of the Area committees, and 50% of Councillors and just railroad plans through against public wishes as you do at the moment.

- When questions are raised at the Area Committees they should be answered by the Councillors not the passed onto the officers.

- Dates of area committee meetings should be posted on the notice board outside Southport Town Hall.

- Southport is different in culture to the bulk of Sefton, we are a tourist town and as such have some very specific needs to satisfy the needs of our visitors. Sefton Council has struggled to understand those needs and continues to take actions which hinder or interfere with tourism. Action taken on the Southport Development Plan is a good first step, but unless rapid change occurs more and more Southport residents will hear the Southport out of Sefton call.

- I do hope that the Area Committees can be kept going and we are made more aware of when they take place and when we can attend and a preview of their discussions made available

- Yes, I feel from the perspective of being a councillor in Sefton, in Southport that we really need to keep these committees going. They are vital for the community of Southport as residents can attend to ask questions, hear reports from the Police and other organisations and also hear what their local councillors have to say and what they are doing on issues that are being raised. Also various partners i.e. the Bid Team in Southport and Emma Atkinson the Director come along frequently to give information out first hand and to answer questions. Margaret Carney the Chief Executive of Sefton Council has also been along to speak to residents and answer questions on the Development plan. At the last Area Committee meeting in Southport nearly 100 members of the public attended. So I firmly believe these area committee meetings, well in Southport at any rate need to be kept.

- Southport Area Committee is the only convenient forum for members of the public to directly address and question members of the council and, when there are specific important issues affecting the town to have issues explained directly by senior council officers. A special Southport Area Committee meeting about the Nexus report attended by the Chef Executive attracted around 100 residents with many constructive comments put forward by locals.

- local issues are for local people to comment on, they need to be circulated better so local people know when and where a meeting is, do not rely on just the visitor paper in Southport, it is losing readers all the time

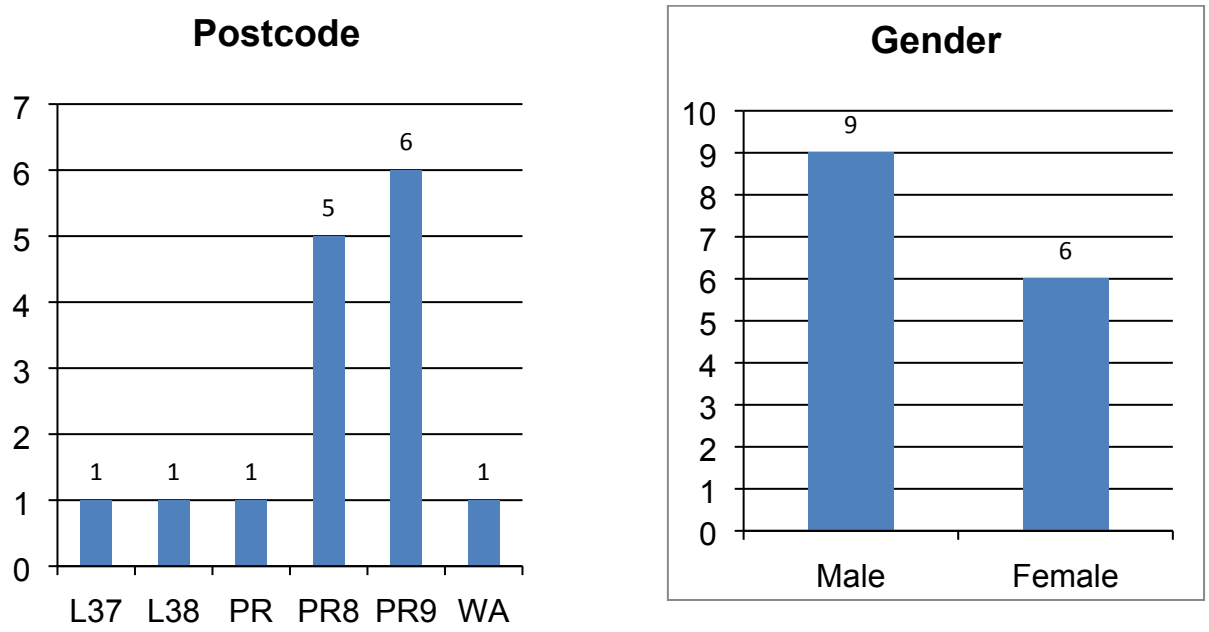
- I would like the area committee to have more say on how OUR town was run rather than councillors from Bootle who show little regard or knowledge of OUR town of Southport.

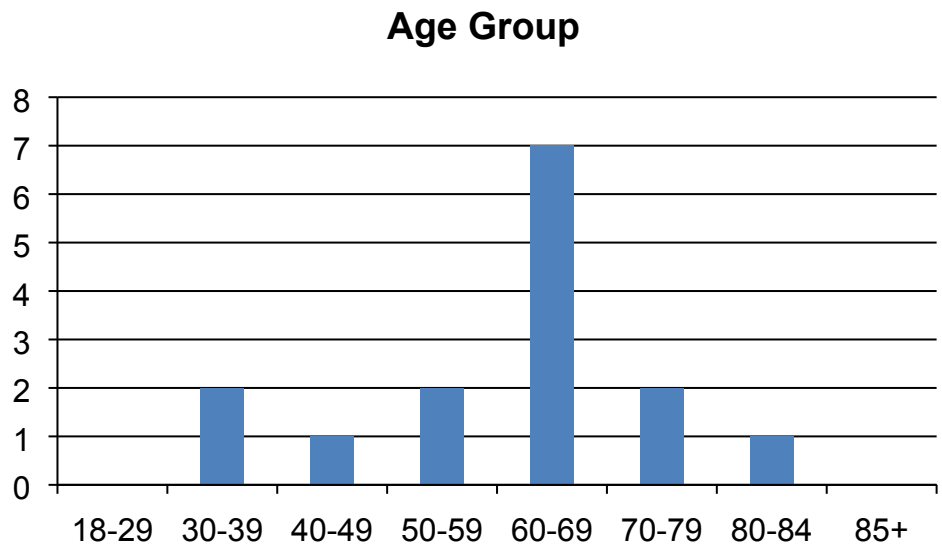
- The Liverpool City Model based on Wards with Cllrs supported by teams is, in my opinion, the way to go.

- Area Committees provide an important means of finding out about actions being taken by the Council or proposed to be taken. There is the ability for the Area Committee to invite partner agencies or others to make presentations to the Committee explaining local developments and how the public can assist. The local media attend the Committee and are able to then publish information put into the public domain at Committee. The ability to raise questions by members of the public and obtain the views not only of the relevant officers, but importantly that of elected Councillors; Some Areas do not want to have another formal area of local government and the Area Committee to some extent provides the necessary local contact. Area Committees, where there are no Parish Councils, could be strengthened by allowing the Committee to exercise a primary decision making function over those functions that can be exercised by a Parish Council.

- Yes, the majority of people are sick to death of being in Sefton, we pay higher insurance because we are linked with Liverpool, and nothing is done that is our decision.

Demography and Equalities Data





Key findings from community events

The following are the key findings from the 14 community events that were held in the five townships across the Borough. These events were advertised and members of the public had an opportunity to book on prior to the event or to turn up at the event of their choice. The events were run as small focus group style consultation in a relaxed informal atmosphere. At the start of each event, a short presentation was given which provided details of the background to the proposals. This was followed by a facilitated discussion session based around the following questions:-

1. Are you aware of Area Committees?
2. If yes, have you ever attended one or raised an issue at one?
3. Should the Council keep Area Committees as a way for members of the public to raise issues with and talk to the Council and Councillors?
4. What would be your preferred way of raising issues and talking to the Council and Councillors if Area Committees did not exist?
5. Do people have any other views or comments?

The table below shows the attendance at each of the events and the main points of discussion.

Event	Attendance	Main points of discussion
Monday 7 March 2016 – Southport (10.00 – 11.00am)	2	• Most people had attended an AC meeting; a couple hadn't • Those that had attended had raised an issue • Keep the AC – opportunity to raise issues, for people to have a voice and to engage with officers direct • If AC's didn't exist – there could be a disconnect between the officers and the public • Preferred ways of contacting the council include Ward Cllr, MP and emailing Officer • The barriers people face include lack of awareness and publicity about meetings, services and ward surgeries, frequency and accessibility of meetings and the website not being up to date • If AC's are not in existence, who will decide
Monday 7 March – Southport (11.00 – 12.00 noon)	4	
Monday 7 March – Southport (5.00pm – 6.00pm	2	
Monday 7 March – Southport (6.00pm – 7.00pm	4	

		how the budget will be spent? • Look at each area individually, not as a collective
Tuesday 15 March 2016 – Bootle (2.00pm – 3.00pm)	0	N/A
Tuesday 15 March 2016 – Bootle (3.00pm – 4.00pm)	0	N/A
Tuesday 15 March 2016 – Bootle (5.00pm – 6.00pm)	0	N/A
Tuesday 15 March 2016 – Bootle (6.00pm – 7.00pm)	0	N/A
Wednesday 16 March 2016 – Maghull (10.00am – 11.00am)	0	N/A
Wednesday 16 March 2016 – Maghull (11.00am – 12.00 noon)	0	N/A
Wednesday 16 March 2016 – Formby (2.00pm – 3.00pm)	1	• Person who attended had previously been a Parish Councillor and was aware of and had attended/taken part in Area Committee meetings • The current set up is too big – it operated much better when Formby had its own Area Committee. • Current Area Committee is undemocratic – issue of introduction of 20mph zones in Formby which the Formby Councillors and residents didn't want but which was voted through by Councillors from the rest of the Wards in South Sefton and this could happen again where Formby Councillors vote against something in the interests of Formby but it could still be voted through. • Old Formby Area Committee was well attended, particularly where items of interest to the whole of Formby were considered • Would like to see Area Committees kept as a way for local people to engage with the Council and Councillors.
Wednesday 16 March – Formby (3.00pm – 4.00pm)	0	N/A
Wednesday 16 March 2016 – Crosby (5.00pm – 6.00pm)	0	N/A
Wednesday 16 March 2016 – Crosby (6.00pm – 7.00pm)	0	N/A

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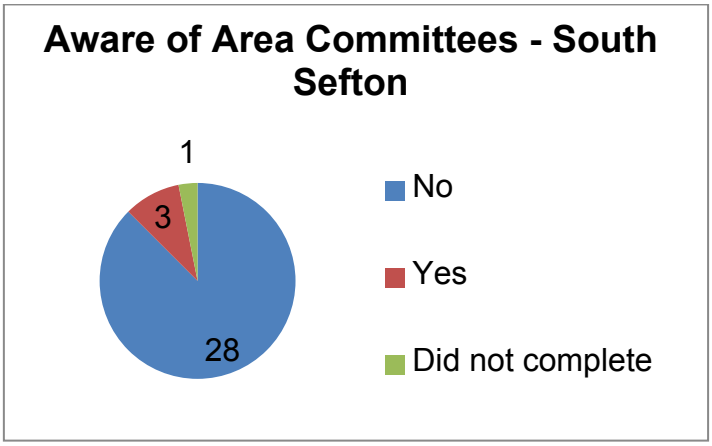
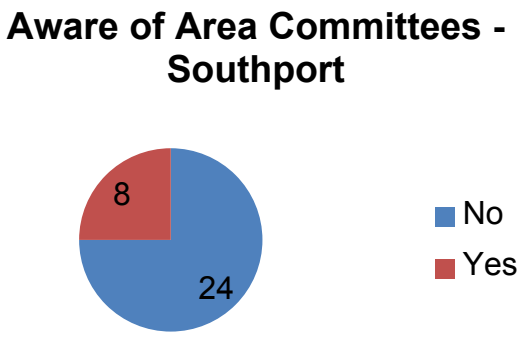
Key findings from Vox Pop (Street Surveys)

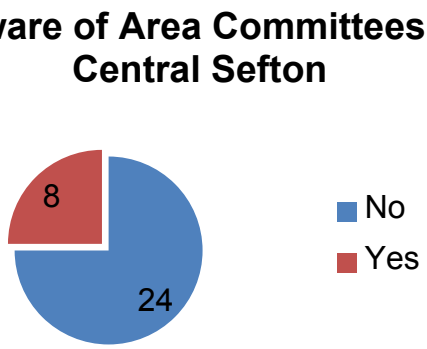
The Street Surveys took place in each of the five townships of the Borough. They took place during the day in locations with high footfall. The aim was to randomly poll the same number of people from the areas represented at an Area Committee composition. In total 96 surveys were completed: 32 from each Area Committee area.

Awareness of Area Committees

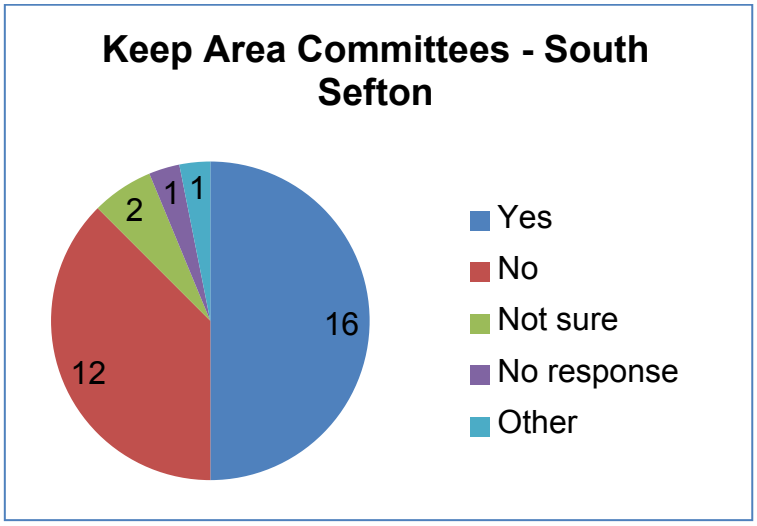
In total, of the 96 people randomly asked to complete the street survey, 76 (79%) people were not aware of the Area Committees, 19 (19%) people were aware of them and 1 person choose not to respond to this question. Of those people who were aware of the Area Committees, 3 had attended a meeting; all at the Central Sefton meeting.



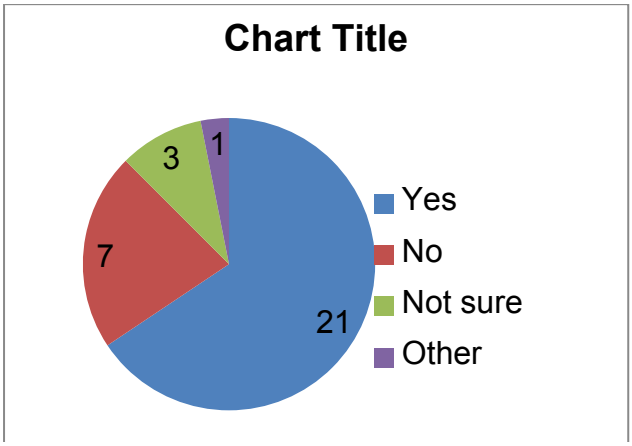


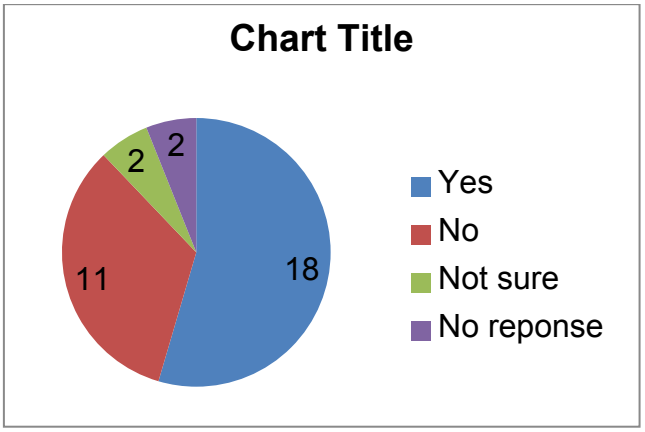


Keep the Area Committees?



Of the 96 respondents, 55 (57%) people said they would like to keep the Area Committees and 29 (30%) people said they shouldn't be kept. The highest response to keep the Area Committees came from respondents in the Southport Area and the highest response to not keep them was from the South Sefton area.





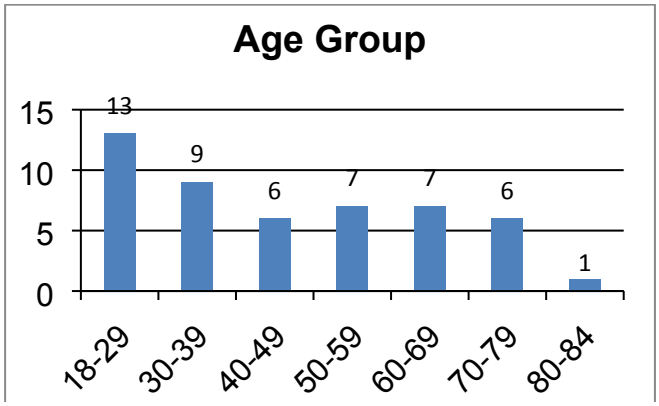
Preferred way of contacting the Council and Councillors

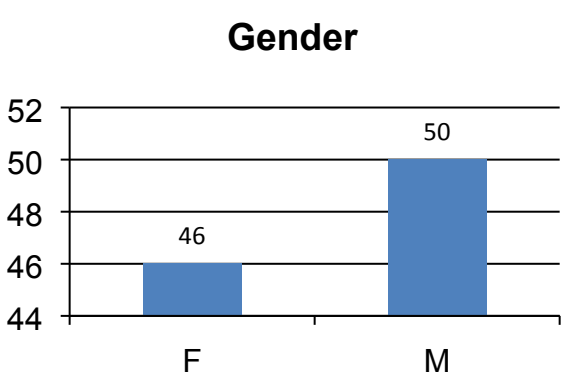
Participants who took part in the street surveys were asked for their preferred way of contacting the Council and Councillors if the Area Committees were not to exist. A wide range of responses were given but some of the common methods include:

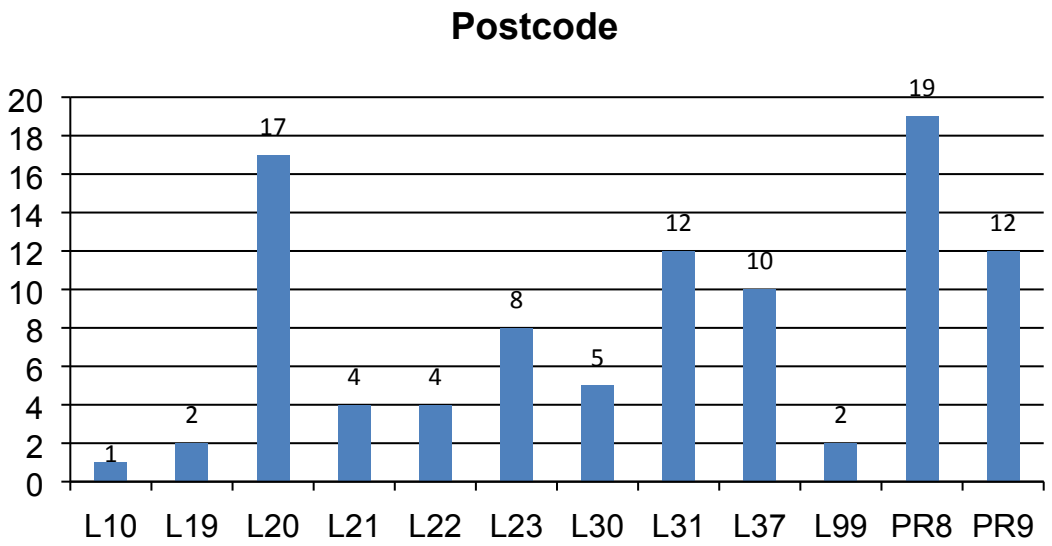
- Ward Councillors (and through surgeries) and local MP's
- Email
- Visit to the One Stop Shop
- Phone

From analysis of the preferred methods, it would seem that across the borough different methods are more appropriate for different age groups. For example, the 18-29 year olds favoured using the phone, visiting the One Stop Shop and emailing. The people who responded from the 30-59 age groups also prefer email and visiting the One Stop Shop and contacting the local Councillor and MP. The 60+ age group would also contact their Councillor and MP, but would also phone the Council.
Although contacting the local Councillor and the MP was a common response, some respondents did also mention that they didn't know who their local Councillor was.

Demographic and equality data







Letters and emails of representation

As part of the consultation plan members of the public, political groups of the Council, Parish and Town Councils and partner organisations were given the opportunity to submit their comments in writing. They were asked to base their responses around the questions used in the Vox Pop Street Surveys. These are their responses:-

Responses from Political Group in Sefton Council

The Labour Group

The vast majority of Area Committee issues are ward related issues as opposed to area issues.

Those attending in terms of residents are often the same individuals and whilst commendable this does not necessarily reflect the views of the majority of residents and as such is a poor vehicle for consultation and engagement.

Area Committees are in some cases too large and unwieldy and as such expensive to run in terms of members and officer time etc.

Members of the public who do attend expect it to be a public forum for debate, so perhaps this is what we should be looking to explore in any alternative models going forward?

There should be some sort of escalation policy that holds Councillors to account in terms of addressing and dealing with resident issues (no response by xx days gets escalated to etc…).

The Liberal Democrat Group

I am submitting this email as the response of the Sefton MBC Liberal Democrat Group to the Council's review of Area Committees.

The Lib Dem response recognises that the development, history and function of the three Area Committees within the Borough have been completely different even though their powers and constitutional situation are identical. So, whereas the Bootle Area Committee and the Sefton Central Area Committee were both amalgamated by the council from smaller units as cost-saving measures determined by the Council, the single Southport Area Committee was created following a referendum of the electors of Southport which preferred the single Southport

Committee both to the status quo ante and to the alternative prospect of a Town Council for Southport.

In other words, the single Southport Area Committee was created by the democratic expression of the people of Southport as to how they wished to have their preferred expression of a limited form of devolved government and had nothing to do with the largely-functional issues which have been put out by the Council for discussion on to date. In particular, the referendum demonstrated the single entity of 'Southport' as being the preferred unit of communal identification and expression i.e. wherever they live within Southport, the majority of the electors have an interest which is not defined at ward or sub-ward level but in the community of Southport. Southport residents recognise the legitimate interest of people from other wards within Southport in decisions taking place in their own immediate locality and they expect the people living in other areas to likewise recognise their own interest in decisions taking place elsewhere within the town.

The above is precisely the opposite of what has happened within the Sefton Central Area Committee. Here, the amalgamation of a number of area committees which previously dealt with genuine communities: Formby, Maghull, Aintree & Lydiate; Crosby has created a situation whereby a totally artificial Committee has been established where residents living within one part of the area have little or no interest in the other areas covered by the committee and resent the prospect of 'outsiders' having a say in their own very local affairs. We would hope that such a change might be made involving discussion with and co-ordination with the various Parish/Town councils within the Sefton Central area. We would not, however, wish to be prescriptive about how this might be achieved.

The importance to the people of Southport of the Southport Area Committee is not so much their own participation in the committee as individuals, (although this is and has been substantially higher than has been the case in both other parts of the Borough) but in the knowledge that issues of particular relevance to the town of Southport are discussed by Southport's own elected representatives in Southport and watched by the people of Southport and their various Southport-specific media. Questions are often put to the Committee designed for answers by the councillors present rather than for officers: i.e. they constitute a means of holding the elected members of the council from the seven Southport wards to account.

Besides discussing matters which are a particular responsibility of the Local Authority, the Area Committee's Police Forum covering the entire town is always a vibrant part of the proceedings taking some time during the meeting and allows the senior police representatives who regularly attend to have a substantial interaction with the Southport public where their own attempts to generate a similar interaction have not been so successful.

We note from the statistics provided to members that public attendance at and involvement in the Southport Area Committee is considerably higher generally than that at the other two bodies.

It is 19 years since the Local Government Boundary Commission for England completed a major review of the relationship between the town of Southport and its people and the Borough of Sefton. One of the significant declarations of the Commission in concluding its review was that an assertion that there was a need for the Borough to take steps to make its decision-making and activities more receptive to the individual and collective needs of the people of Southport than was then the case.

There can be no doubt that the creation of a single Area Committee for Southport was a useful method of the Council demonstrating a receptiveness to the collective views of the residents of Southport which would be lost were this Committee to be dismantled or its activities curtailed. We therefore support the retention of the Southport Area Committee irrespective of whether the other two Committees are retained or modified from their present formats. We would suggest,

furthermore, that the governance of the Borough might be improved by restoring the community-based focus of discussion

I hope that the above contribution is useful.

Conservative Group

No response received

Responses from Individual Councillors

Councillors Dutton and Jamieson

Formby, Crosby, Maghull and Southport

I understand you have already received a submission relating to Southport so I will confine my observations to the other areas affected.

Prior to the merging of Central Sefton as one committee, in the individual committees we regularly had good attendance.

With the input from Police and Public Forum local residents fed back to us they felt involved in their community.

Since the enlargement there has been a dis-connect particularly in Formby where issues are very localised within the confines of Formby town.

Despite Surgeries, Facebook, Twitter, other social media and the phone, the localised Area Committee was seen as a contact point to find out 'what's going on'.

Also feedback suggests the perception is that decisions are being taken by Councillors that are not privy to the localised issues that affect residents directly because they do not represent, electorally, the 'local area'.

An example of this was 20mph roll out; four of six Formby councillors voted against this but is was carried by weight of committee. This is not local representation.

We would not wish to see Area Committees broken up and their workings devolved out to the Area Partnerships as they are not inclusive across the political spectrum nor do they have any public awareness.

In our opinion Area Partnerships do little to add to the local benefit.

We would like to see Formby and Crosby Area Committees re-instated to their former situation with locally elected members making local decisions.

We feel this will re-connect with residents and encourage their involvement with Council.

Councillor Jo Barton

Please be aware that I am very concerned to hear any rumours or talk about cancelling this committee which is of vital use to both residents and Councillors alike and provides a forum where views on issues concerning only Southport can be aired in a safe environment. I for one would be very unhappy if this committee was to cease to function!

APPENDIX 1

Councillor Mike Booth

The following are my views on the future of Southport Area Committee:
According to Sefton's own website, the function of Area Committees is "The Committee is a focus for consultation and discussion about issues in its area and for making decisions on local transport, planning and environmental matters".

Residents often claim that decisions are made without listening to their views and their needs. Area Committees provide this in the form of an open forum where the public can raise questions and hold their elected members and officers to account.

I've looked at the attendance records for the years 2103/14 and 2014/15 and I've noted the following:

Over the 2 years Southport Area Committee was attended by 121 members of the public.
South Sefton Area Committee was attended by 49 members of the public
Central Sefton Area Committee was attended by 226 members of the public
Central Sefton is an amalgamation of previous area committees and this may explain the large attendances.
Looking at lowest attendees for individual meetings, on 3 occasions South Sefton was only attended by 3 members of the public and by 2 members of the public on one occasion.
In comparison Southport Area Committee's lowest attendance has been 8 on one occasion!

The figures prove the worth of Southport Area Committee.

There has been a lot of time and effort given to devolving powers and decentralisation. If area committees are removed it will only serve to hand all decision making to a small group of councillors. Politics then takes over and decisions may be based on political gains rather than being based on the needs of the residents. Local decisions should be made by elected members who represent the wards concerned.

An additional benefit of area committees is the time given for the police to make regular reports and to answer questions raised by elected members and members of the public. The importance and value of this, in the eyes of the police, was shared with those present at the last Southport Area Committee. We were told that many of the meetings organised by the police themselves were very poorly attended when compared with area committees.

If it transpires that either, or both, of the other 2 area committees decide that their purpose is no longer required by their residents; could I ask that the legality of maintaining Southport Area Committee on its own be examined in full?

Could I also ask for a comparison of the number of questions raised by the public at the 3 area committees? This may give an indication of how important the meetings are to the public in each of the 3 areas.

In conclusion, my view is that Southport wants and needs its area committee. The various options suggested to replace area committees are impractical and they will not work.
Area committees aim to bring about faster decision-making, greater openness, better quality services and greater public participation in local government.

Councillor Fred Weavers

Southport did have a referendum and decided they wished to have a single Area Committee. To get rid of the Area Committee would probably need another referendum and will result in a neighbourhood forum and or Southport Town Council. If the Cabinet decided to change its timing of its meetings to 6:30 and also ran an agenda for the Area Committee that would save money and get more accountability for the residents of the borough.

Councillor Marianne Welsh

I feel that this committee is vital for Southport and its residents. We only have a few of these committees now each year, and have to get through a lot at each one but we do. Many of our partners come along on a regular basis updating us all and answering questions which I feel is needed. There are also questions from the public and I feel that the Area Committee is a vital platform for us the councillors and partners and residents. I do not want us to lose the Area Committees.

Responses from Advisory Group Members

Submission 1 (Southport)

I wish to register my concern as I mentioned at the last Area Committee about the prospect of the Area Committee being closed. It is exceedingly important to Southport that the Area Committee continues and that the residents have a democratic voice to bring matters to the meeting for discussion. Why should Southport be penalised because the other Area Committees do not have many attendees? We have by far the most attendees to our meetings that are interested in Southport. The residents also have the opportunity to request funding and it also makes the rest of the people, Councillors as well, aware of what is needed and going on in Southport.

Submission 2 (Southport)

- Southport is the most well attended Area Committee within Sefton. Many local residents still attend the meetings.

- The Area Committees are crucial for residents to be able to raise concerns and work with the Area Coordinators in resolving issues.

- The face to face Cabinet Member updates have now stopped and if the Area Committees also stop the Council will become faceless and residents who do not have access to the internet / twitter / Facebook will struggle to make contact with Committee Members and the Area Coordinators.

- Face to face is much more personal and is fundamental to residents who want to raise concerns which matter to them.

APPENDIX 1

Responses from Parish Councils

Lydiate Parish Council

At the meeting of Lydiate Parish Council held on 23rd February 2016, there was a discussion about the consultation into the future of the Area Committee structure in Sefton.

As members of the Sefton Central Area Committee, concerns had already been made that the move to larger areas in 2013 had made meetings far less effective. The needs of too many communities need to be considered, which means that time is not available to discuss local issues in detail and meeting venues are often too far away from local residents. In order to achieve meaningful community engagement, Lydiate Parish Council would recommend retaining an Area Committee structure but returning to small geographical area coverage. For this area, a Committee covering the Maghull and Lydiate areas would be most effective.

Hightown Parish Council

As I said at the last Sefton South Area Committee we as parish Councillors are elected by the same Act of Parliament and in the same way as the ward councillors.

In Sefton about 30% of the electorate have parish or town councils. All of these have open seasons for the public to present petitions or can ask questions? Many of these also have ward councillors attending or are Parish councillors. One solution may be to encourage the formation of new groups to increase the more localised element of consultation.

I would recommend that you come and discuss this not only with the PC meetings but better with the 10 Parishes group.

Aintree parish Council

We write in response to your letter dated 11 February 2016 advising the Parish Council of the consultation exercise into the future of the three Area Committees. The responses have followed your preferred structure as set out in your letter.

1. Are you aware of the Area Committees?

The Parish Council is fully aware of the existence of the Area Committees.

The Parish Council understands that members of the general public do not have clear visibility, or an understanding, of the purpose of the Area Committees. When was the last time that the work of the Area Committees was published in the public domain or a 'call' for attendance made within the local communities which each Committee serves?

2. If you have ever attended one or raised an issue?

The Parish Council has a representative on the Sefton Central Area Committee.

3. Which Area Committee have you attended?

The Parish Council is represented on the Central Sefton Area Committee and was represented on the former Area Committee (Sefton East Parishes) before this was combined.

4. Should the Council keep Area Committee as a way for members of the public to raised issues with and talk to the Council and Councillors?

Area Committees should be retained in order to provide members of the public with a 'local' forum in which to raise issues and concerns, however as the public are not permitted to enter into the debate they are limited in their effectiveness. In this age of localism the Area Committee should play an important, if not a vital, role in the democratic process.

Whilst the Sefton East Parish Councils have a right of attendance and have an opportunity to provide the Committee with an 'update' they are otherwise constrained by the fact that they do not possess voting rights (so their hands are tied) and that any questions they want to raise are required days in advance (so they are effectively gagged).

Consideration should be given as to how to raise the visibility and understanding of Area Committees within our communities, engagement is key to a healthy democracy.

5. What would be your preferred way of raising issues with and talking to the Council and Councillors if Area Committees did not exist?

The Parish Council would not want to see the replacement of the Area Committees with purely electronic forums; whilst e-petitions and e-forms do have a role to play in public engagement they do not replace the value of face-to-face meetings.

The Parish Council considers that any re-structure of Area Committees would necessarily have to be at a more local level, the previous Area Committee structure was more effective and based at a local level.

6. What do you see as the key barriers to raising issues and talking to the Council and Councillors?

The Parish Council understands that a key barrier to members of the public raising issues is a perception that the Council and Councillors do not listen to what the public have to say, that consultation exercises with the strap line 'your Sefton your say' are just a "tick in the box" and that decisions have perceived to have already been made, the consultation is to make it 'look' democratic.

7. Do you have any other views or comments?

The Parish Council is of the opinion that the merger of the Formby, Crosby and Sefton East Parishes Area Committees into the Central Sefton Area Committee created a Committee that was too large and cumbersome and that the new Committee has not serve proved to be as effective.

There is a real concern amongst the public that the majority, if not all, decisions are made before an Area Committee actually meets due to the size of the majority of the ruling party as Councillors have been directed (whipped) as to which way to vote. If this perception is correct then democracy is seriously threatened. A healthy democracy actively encourages debate and respects opposing views; decision-making can be greatly improved should politicians actively listen to one another and to the public they represent, ensuring that the 'bigger picture' is reflected upon.

The public must have a mechanism to challenge decisions and to provide local knowledge and perspective. This point was made at the Central Sefton Committee on 7 January 2016:

"Area Committees had somewhat lost their way, they were created as a tool to counter-balance the Cabinet's power, however, with so few decisions being "called in" they were struggling to find a roll to fulfil;"

We trust that the Council will take full consideration of the above in its deliberations over the future of the Area Committees which if run effectively are key to ensuring true democracy across the Borough.

Formby Area Committee

Just thought I'd let you know my thoughts on the subject of the area committee following Thursdays meeting.

I cannot see the need for such a large gathering, and I think the majority feel the same. No real business is achieved, and Information from the police is only appropriate to the local areas concerned.

In terms of expense, my suggestion would be that the role of the area committee becomes part of the responsibility of the Parish Council. The local PC would hold the area meeting and the responsible officer would take the minutes. I would see this working very well for Formby; it would assist in building the relationship between ward and Parish Councillors (currently poor in Formby) and would focus much more on the local area. Public engagement could well be increased as local residents would become aware of the regular local meetings, rather than jumping around the borough. Additionally local councillors would make decisions on local matters, rather than have a Formby councillor voting on something in Bootle and vice versa.

Responses from Members of the Public

Submission 1

The following is my response to your request for comments in relation to the current Area Committees operating in the Sefton Council area.

My experience of attending Area Committees is limited to that in Southport (which is quite well attended) where I regularly raise issues.

Prior to the existence of this committee, I regularly attended the previous Southport South, North and East Area Committees which were also well attended.

Geographically, Southport is situated well away from the centre of local governance within the area and some Southport people no doubt look upon the local area committee as their only opportunity to have their concerns addressed by council officers who are seen as being inaccessible at any other time.

Having said that, there are obviously a lot of Southport people who never attend and probably do not know that the Area Committee exists.

In an area where local people feel that they have lost local governance to Bootle, it is seen by some as the sole link with those who make the decisions and is, currently, the only community link for Southport people.

These days it is quite difficult to even speak to council decision makers by telephone as the only point of telephone contact is through a member of a call team who often appear reluctant to transfer calls to council departments.

I fully understand that the cost of running the area committees is money that could, perhaps, be better spent elsewhere and that other ways of allowing the people of Southport to feel more inclusive to the democratic process should be investigated.

One possible alternative would be the setting up of a Parish (Town) Council for Southport.

This would obviously have limited (parish council) powers but could help Southport people to feel that they had some local representation.

The current national government is keen to establish more parish councils, particularly in urban areas, throughout the country as part of their national devolution plan. The Government Department for Communities and Local Government are supporting the National Association of Local Councils in setting up new parish councils in order to give people a voice, delivering local services and influencing how public money is spent in their area.

The Parish Councillors could provide a link between local people, Borough Councillors and Council Officers.

It is my understanding that if 7.5% of the Southport electorate were to sign a petition requesting that consideration be given to setting up a Southport Town (Parish) Council that this would trigger a review into that possibility.

I am mindful that a Parish Council would involve a council tax precept and that this could be a "stumbling block" for some people.

However, I would be grateful if you could provide me with the overall cost of running the current Southport Area Committee, and whether a reduced percentage of this amount could be diverted into a Southport Parish Council scheme in order to keep the precept to a minimum.

It has to be said that some areas of Sefton have had both a parish council and an Area Committee for many years. In Southport we have only ever had the Area Committee.

I would be interested to be given the opportunity to discuss this matter with yourself, or an appropriate member of the council.

Submission 2

I refer to your letter of the 11th February 2016, and the public statements concerning the future of the Area Committees. I have been a Parish Councillor for Formby for twelve years, its Chairman for four of those and past Chairman of the Sefton Area Partnership of Local Councils.

To answer your specific questions first, I do have a working knowledge of the Area Committees and their purpose, I have raised a number of issues for Formby and for other parishes from time to time and presented at the earlier meetings on specific projects. I have attended to the Central Sefton AC and its predecessors the Formby Area Committee, and the Sefton East Area Committee.

My additional comments include:

APPENDIX 1

1. It is accepted that the current committee structure and remit with 27 ward councillors and the additional parish councillors does not work. It was far too cumbersome despite the work put in by the then Chairman, Cllr xxxxxxxxxxxxx

2. The previous arrangements where the committees were too many and impossible to coordinate did not work either, and in Formby's case achieved only minor success. The Chairs of that committee were sometimes out of their depth and did little or no preparation, and stifled discussion.

3. The Sefton Council is led by the majority Labour Party, but the ward councillors have failed to bring forward matters of concern for discussion. Examples of these are the impact upon the Borough, as part of the Liverpool City Region, and the consequences of the Peel Development, which are real big issues.

4. The officers who attend do not prepare well and prefer to 'escape' from the meeting as soon as they can! As a consequence they are contributing to the problem of communication for of the Borough Council.

5. The Sefton Neighbourhood Team has a huge agenda, but the constant changes in management structure have made it almost ineffective, and therefore it has become selective in its approach. There have been changes in priority and have achieved little. I can advise you from personal experience, xxxxxxxxxxxx and I spent a good deal of time trying to find ways to improve engagement with the parished areas in particular. The outcome was the Sefton Charter, which to many officers is unknown and yet has full approval and support of the Cabinet. In order to offer an option to improve, it is suggested that there is a dedicated officer, who has the power to see things through, and for them to be proactive not defensive.

6. The Area Committee agendas were too large and not focused. More importantly the meetings were never used to communicate down when they could have been used to better advantage. This must be corrected.

7. The local communities in the CSAC are far more diverse than Sefton imagine, and so to have a meaningful meeting, it must be acknowledged that the parish councils are far better aware of what goes on their community than Sefton officers will ever do in future. The parishes will be better placed, informed, and committed to dealing with issues affecting residents, and the SMBC should subscribe fully to that aim. The new chair of the CSAC is out of touch with the villages and communities. Formby, for example, has a good many issues that are inter-linked, one depending on the other. The economic issues cannot be resolved without an agreed strategy on the environment, infrastructure, communication and traffic as an example. The Parish Council has set this out in the past, but there has been little understanding by the Planners, failing to believe that these can all is resolved without party political meddling.

8. The SAPLC and SMBC have set out the process by which local issues can be managed, receiving approval by Cabinet. But officers of Sefton have shown once again that they do not understand how by working together, all can benefit.

9. Last of all to underline the concern local residents have made it clear what they think that when serious questions were asked the formal answers were perfunctory, flippant or evasive!

So in summary the structure cannot remain as it is or the opportunity to change and adapt to the new financial disciplines will be missed. The individual parish councils should build on what they have done, revise what they should do and set out the procedures to do so.

Legal and Finance issues

There are specific legal and financial issues that have to be addressed whatever action you recommend, and in setting them out it will help to refine the role of the Parish Councils.

The pressure on expenditure will increase whatever Government in is power, especially social, education and welfare

Next Steps

I would like to offer some ideas for consideration:

1. Assess the findings of this consultation fairly and objectively.

2. Establish a small team of no more than 4 key players to set out the recommendations for change.

3. Establish the two Area Committees - Sefton East and Sefton West.

4. Review the role of Ward councillors, aiming to reduce them to one per ward, and taking into account boundary changes, train those remaining fully. Make the meetings informative and the Parish Councils accountable.

5. Give the two new committees the task of putting forward programme of work, and actively support their work to inform public on such matters as:

    Economy — Liverpool City Region, Peel Developments, etc.
    Health and Well-being
    Security and Safety
    Traffic and parking
    Social welfare
    Licensing and betting.

I very much hope that full consideration be given to the public's comments and concerns, and I look forward to attending the public meetings and listening to the arguments put forward.

Submission 3

It is not a forum that encourages participation or interest from residents and is generally poorly attended. Aside from regular questioners and participants there appears to be little interest in the work of the committee. In my view most people in Southport are unaware of the existence of the committee, its purpose and function

I note that amongst the Area Committees, Southport Area Committee generates by far the most work for officers in terms of reports that are requested by councillors. I see little if any value to residents from the production of these reports.

Many councillors appear to see the committee as a vehicle for their own political agenda rather than as a means of assisting residents.

Regarding consultation between residents and councillors, I think that well publicised surgeries where councillors can be approached on an individual basis by residents is a far more effective means of engagement. Furthermore, I feel that it should be compulsory for councillors to hold consultation and advice surgeries. I note that two wards in Southport have no opportunity for residents to engage with councillors via an advice surgery. My view is that the current Area Committee arrangement fails to deliver effective consultation with residents. It is therefore poor value for money.

I think that the council should communicate more effectively with residents to ensure there is a full understanding of the decisions made that affect council service provision and to give residents a true picture of the financial challenges facing the authority. This would help prevent misinformation and misunderstanding about the budget cuts that the council is being compelled to undertake. This communication could consist of a simple and cheap newsletter to all residents.

There should be more opportunity to submit questions to councillors and the council in a simple format, for instance an easy to use and well publicised form on the council website.

In my view Area Committee funds should be allocated to wards on a basis that takes into account levels of deprivation rather than the current approach of an equal allocation to each ward. Area Committee funds should be better publicised so that residents have the opportunity to put forward their views on how they could be spent. There is a significant underspend in the Area Committee ward budget that I feel should be addressed. There are other methods of spending funds allocated to wards such as St Helens Council Councillor Improvement Fund and Liverpool City Council Neighbourhood Teams, and I think these should be examined further.

Submission 4

I have been a Sefton resident for most of my life. I am now 63. I have never heard of the Area Committee and therefore feel that it cannot be fulfilling any useful purpose.

I would like to be able to take any of my problems direct to my local councillors, who should be encouraged and indeed funded to have surgeries for this very purpose.

Any funds left over from this should be allocated to individual wards on the basis of any deprivation index usually used, and spent by the councillors as their constituents require.

Thank you

Submission 5

I feel the area committee meetings are one of the bastions of local democracy. A person's voice can be heard and can contribute to decision making on a personal level. I have attended a number over the years where subjects close to my heart have been agendered. If a person is to feel they matter in this society in my opinion these meetings are as important as seeing your M.P.

Submission 6

If I buy a product from a shop I can take it back. The problem can be solved there and then. Imagine if the shopkeeper said he would have to contact his Head Office or the manufacturer before he was authorised to take action and he did not know when he would get a reply.

At the moment I can contact my ward councillor. Depending on the problem this can be raised at Southport Area Committee because other people may be having the same problem. Without the

area committees then all problems will have to be raised at full council meetings instead of a quick local solution.

Submission 7

I am disappointed with proposal to axe the area committees. It is a retrograde step for local democracy as well as total disregard for the views of local people.

Southport Area Committee is an opportunity to discuss local issues with local councillors - the aim being to give residents a greater say in what happens in their area as well as raise pertinent issues. If the area committee is axed local people will feel even further remote from the decisions being made at Bootle.

The Council should be promoting and encouraging more participation by the residents of Sefton not less. Perhaps the Council should undertake surveys to find ways to engage the public as it is public money they are spending!
I would urge the Council not to axe the local committees.

Submission 8

1. Yes I am aware of Area Committees and the pivotal role they play in localised democracy.

2. Yes.

3. South Sefton.

4. Yes – Area Committees were introduced with the aim of encouraging greater participation by local people in decision-making and improving service delivery. Area Committees recognise that local representatives are better able to reflect the views of local residents and bring extra knowledge and experience to meetings to support local Councillors in their decision making.

5. If area committees did not exist and the council had an over reliance on technology you may get a disproportionate view of local issues as many older people would self-exclude themselves from the digital democratic process. There is no justification other than budget cuts to remove area committees from the democratic process.

6. The only time you get to see your local representatives and council officers are when they want you to participate in their consultation. The Area Committees are the only way local people have a real opportunity to raise “Their Own” issues and get a full and frank response from council representative. Local petitions are time consuming and whilst they have a role to play in a democratic process, have only limited opportunities to get heard at Council meetings. VCF forums are largely represented by working officers, many of whom do not live in Sefton and their views are over represented already, with many people attending multiple forums already.

7. This is the only opportunity many Sefton residents have to talk, discuss and raise issues with their local councillors face to face. Many of us feel totally frustrated by making representation via email and the facelessness of it. Also many councillors will not be held to account with the removal of a committee structure. It can be extremely frustrating trying to get in touch with our local representatives and the faceless wonder of technology, which gives them an opportunity to respond with prudence and a lack of debating lustre, creating a very sterile democratic process.

If the Area Committees are decommissioned this will be contrary to the whole localism bill, and a massive blow to local democracy. Local people will be further excluded from the decision making process. New methods of consultation are and can be seen as exclusive or prejudicial due to the way local people would need to be able to engage with them and Area Committees are open to everyone to attend.

An alternative solution may be to total cessation would be to reduce the number of paid officers and councillors who attend and allow the meetings to be run with more lay representatives and on a quarterly basis only. That would help with reducing financial burden and allow ever more local participation in the democratic process. This is a rational compromise and I truly believe that this would be a far better solution than withdrawing the Area Committee process altogether.

Submission 9

1. Are you aware of Area Committees? - No

2. If you have you ever attended one or raised an issue? - No

4. Should the Council keep Area Committees as a way for members of the public to raise issues with and talk to the Council and Councillors?
   Only if residents are made aware of them and can access them.

5. What would be your preferred way of raising issues with and talking to the Council and Councillors if Area Committees did not exist?
   Newsletter, drop in point , email, telephone contact

6. What do you see as the key barriers to raising issues and talking to the Council and Councillors?
   Not being aware of who they are or how I can access them

7. Do you have any other views or comments?

   How successful have the council and councillors been at resolving issues?

   Are the same residents always attending if so I think this would highlight lots of other residents are unaware of these services

Submission 10

Area committees should be retained as a link between the local residents and Sefton Council, which represents the whole of Sefton by definition. The Area committees are also by definition much more local. Members know the area more intimately and can address issues which may seem more trivial to the Borough Council. These types of issues, however, are appreciated and do make a difference to local areas.

One example is the landscaping outside the shops on Harington Road Formby. The bleak paving now looks softer and greener. Next we need some seats and a coffee shop!

The planters on our Main Street looked lovely in the summer.

Email is a great way to communicate with the committee. The small price we pay is worth the cost.

Submission 11

When the Area Committees' were first established they appeared to perform a useful purpose and were well attended and much of the content of the meetings' was relevant to those attending. I regularly attended both the Crosby and Formby Area Committees and found them useful forums for an exchange of views between the elected members and their constituents. The establishment of the Sefton Central Area Committee comprising some 26 Sefton Councillors representing 9 Wards together with 18 representatives of nine Parish Councils is, in my opinion, too large and unwieldy to properly address issues of local concern.

On the evening of Thursday 7th January 2016 I was the only member of the public attending the Sefton Central Area Committee. I counted 32 Sefton Councillors' and Parish Councillors' together with three or four Officers in attendance. And during the proceeding only one question was raised and addressed. Moreover, the subsequent debate on Item 7 showed that there was a complete lack of enthusiasm amongst Members for continuance of the present format of the Area Committees'.

So, if on cost grounds there is not going to be return to the original format of the Area Committees' then other options must be explored if Councillors are not to disappear into the equivalent of the "Westminster Bubble" and become even more remote from the people they represent in Sefton than at present!.

Indeed, it is evident to me that what concerns people most and on which action actually takes place tends to occur at the level below the Sefton Central Area Committee. For example, the concerns about SSP's delivery on doctors' surgeries was actually initiated and spearheaded by Hightown residents and Hightown Parish Council. The concern about the Wind Farm development in West Lancashire is being spearheaded by residents of Ince Blundell and the Ince Blundell Parish Council. The initiative regarding the garden at the back of Formby Library by Formby Parish Council with match funding provided by Sefton Council. The current hearings into Sefton's Local Plan involves Fragoff, Formby Parish Council, Maghull Parish Council and Hightown Parish Council, Thornton Parish Council and Melling Parish Council who are voicing concerns on behalf of local residents regarding the Local Plan. Together with concerned residents they appear to be the only agents apart from the CPRE, Wildlife agencies and Bill Esterson MP, who are voicing the concerns of local people regarding Sefton's Local Plan. Moreover, you will know there are numerous examples in Sefton where Ward Councillors have become involved in community initiatives away from their own party politics on the grounds of local need.

In consequence I would do away with the Area Committees' in Sefton as at present structured and revert to the Ward Structure Scheme as developed in Liverpool City. Ward Councillors could then concentrate on their Neighbourhoods and Parishes to give support and guidance. If there are differing politicians in each Ward so be it! In the past I have known Labour and Conservative Ward Councillors, irrespective of their political differences, work very well together on Ward issues. Again, irrespective of party differences, Members will have to learn to act as a team for the benefit of all their Ward constituents! Each Ward should have a relevant budget through which Members could support minor schemes. Neighbourhood Teams would assist Ward Councillors in their endeavours. If there is an issue in a Parish or Neighbourhood then the Ward Councillors should take a lead in assisting or advising on the issue. I would do away with the concept of surgeries and instead have a number of sites in the Ward where constituents might meet with their Ward Councillors', e.g. Formby Swimming Pool or Lady Green Garden Centre in the case of Ravenmeols Ward Councillors.

Finally, if the Area Committees' are to be scrapped can I ask that any savings in Officers or Members time be put into getting rid of the 0845 telephone numbers charges that are imposed on residents when making enquiries or raising queries on Sefton Council issues. If the Borough is to be open and transparent in its dealing with its residents it should not be imposing such charges.

Conclusion. Sefton should seek to adopt a scheme similar to that adopted by Liverpool City Council as an alternative to Sefton's present Area Committee Structure.