Sefton Council

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
(REGULATORY, COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)

AREA COMMITTEES WORKING GROUP
FINAL REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2017

Overview & Scrutiny

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LEAD MEMBER'S INTRODUCTION

I am very pleased to introduce this Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) Area Committees Working Group report;

The journey to consider the Area Committees started with a report on the purpose, remit etc. of Area Committees being considered by each individual Area Committee during December 2015/January 2016. There then followed an extensive consultation exercise with members of the public, The details of the outcome of that consultation process can be found in Appendix 1 in Paragraph 9 to this Final Report. The consultation and engagement process took place over an 8 week period from 1 February to 31 March 2016. In summary over 230 people and/or organisations involved themselves with the consultation and engagement process through the various channels. In combination, over 50% of participants wanted to retain the Area Committee forum, but not necessarily in the way that it currently operated or on the same geographical footprint. Anecdotally of those that responded, many were previously unaware of the existence of those Area Committees. The responses were recorded from the public through e-survey, community events, letters, street surveys etc. In addition parish councils, individual councillors and groups responded to the survey.

When the outcome of the consultation was reported to Cabinet in June 2016, they then determined that the matter should be further considered by Overview and Scrutiny. The main purpose of the further consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee working group being established was to review the findings of the public consultation exercise undertaken on the role of Area Committees, and the other issues set out in the report submitted to the Cabinet on 23 June 2016.

The Working Group adhered to its established terms of reference and objectives (see paragraph 2 below) in interviewing witnesses and its drafting of recommendations; and by inviting expert witnesses to come to interviews at various stages of the review carried out by the Working Group - it ensured that we maintained a wide-angle lensed analysis of the views and concerns of residents. We undertook evidence-based dialogue with the community, partners and experts to better understand the needs, wishes and challenges faced across the borough. This Working Group maintained a focus of providing residents with an assurance that Sefton would continue to bring together its diverse communities and strive to make Sefton a place where people can openly engage with their local representatives by examining new options for accessible discussion forums in a modern and technologically-evolving age.
We can be proud of the Working Groups efforts to ensure that discussions were equitable, open, honest, pragmatic and conducted within a progressive framework in the interest of our residents

I wish to thank all those people who gave up their valuable time to be interviewed by the Working Group. The input and expertise of interviewees greatly helped the Working Group in the formulation of its recommendations. Finally, I am extremely grateful to my fellow cross-party Working Group Members for their commitment and their ideas and contributions.

Councillor Carla Thomas,
Lead Member, Area Committees
Working Group

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 At its meeting held on 13 September 2016 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) approved the establishment of a Working Group to review the findings of the public consultation exercise undertaken on the role of Area Committees, and the other issues set out in the report submitted to the Cabinet on 23 June 2016.

1.2 Councillors Jamieson, McGuire, Robinson and Thomas were originally appointed to serve on the Working Group. However, following Councillor Robinson's selection as Mayor of Sefton in May 2017 Councillor Byrom was appointed as Councillor Robinson's replacement on the Working Group.

1.3 Councillor Thomas was appointed Lead Member. Details of Working Group meetings are set out below:-

Date	Activity
21.10.16	Scoping Document approved Selection of witnesses approved
18.11.16	Interview Key Witnesses Barbara Rouse - South Sefton Area Committee Local Advisory Group Member Parish Councillor Anne Ibbs – Central Sefton Area Committee Parish Council Representative Sir Ron Watson – Southport Area Committee Local Advisory Group Member Parish Councillor Gerry Lee - Chair of the Sefton Area Partnership of Local Councils and Central Sefton Area Committee Parish Council Representative Ian Willman, Service Manager, Neighbourhoods
09.12.16	Interview Key Witnesses Parish Councillor Kevin Sharpe – Central Sefton Area Committee Parish Council Representative Sandra Cain – Southport Area Committee Local Advisory Group Member Jan McMahon, Head of Strategic Support Michael Mainwaring, Workforce Learning and Development Manager
19.04.17	Meeting to discuss and consider information requested at previous meetings
06 and 26.07.17	Meetings to consider models of community engagement suggested by Working Group Members

2.0 TERMS OF REFERENCE AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 The Terms of Reference and Objectives of the Working Group were approved as part of the scoping exercise at the first meeting and are set out below.

2.2 Terms of Reference and Objectives

2.2.1 Review the findings of the public consultation exercise undertaken on the role of Area Committees, and the other issues set out in the report submitted to the Cabinet on 23 June 2016

(**NOTE**: The Working Group at its meeting held on 21 October 2016 considered the report submitted to Cabinet. Upon consideration of this report the Working Group agreed to:-

(1) Update the Terms of Reference of the Scoping Document to include the following:-

"To consider how section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funding would be spent in a revised Area Committee structure"; and

"To consider the remit of Area Committees"; and

(2) Seek information on the following:-

(a) how Area Committees operate in other local authorities;

(b) the views of the Local Government Association, North West Employers and Merseyside Police on the operation of Area Committees; and

(c) attendance statistics at previous meetings of Area Committees.

Regarding (1) above see Paragraphs 2.2.7 and 2.2.8 below.

Regarding (2) (a), (b) and (c) above information on these issues can be found in paragraph 5 of the Final Report).

2.2.2 Review modern methods of engagement between councils and their councillors and councillors and their communities, including the operation of community forums by other local authorities, the use of social media and guidance on its use

(**NOTE**: The Working Group fulfilled the terms of this objective by investigating how Area Committees operated in other local authorities (see Paragraph 5) and particular attention was paid to the Bournemouth model. Regarding social media use this matter was raised during witness interviews (see Paragraphs 4.6, 4.10, 4.12 and 4.16). The Working Group also considered a Neighbourhood and community engagement Councillor workbook and a copy can be viewed if you click here).

2.2.3 To consider whether a programme of communication training for members should be developed with particular emphasis on the social media aspects of modern communication in their role as 'Community Champions'

(**NOTE**: This matter was considered during witness interviews with Jan McMahon, Head of Strategic Support and Michael Mainwaring, Workforce and Learning and Development Manager – see Paragraphs 4.10, 4.12, 4.14 and 4.16)

2.2.4 Review ways of communicating information about councillors' expenditure in their wards and associated decision making processes

(**NOTE**: Currently this is achieved by the Head of Communities submitting a Budget Monitoring report to each Area Committee detailing devolved budgets allocated by Ward Councillors. Consideration has been given to such expenditure and recommendations suggested by Councillor McGuire (Paragraph 6.2 5) and Councillor Thomas (Paragraph 6.3 (3) E) aim to retain Ward budgets but in slightly amended forms).

2.2.5 To consider whether a system of escalation for the public where a councillor cannot be contacted, does not respond to contact or does not make themselves available for surgeries etc. can be developed

(**NOTE**: Consideration has been given to this matter and Councillor Thomas has suggested a recommendation that Constituency Fora consider complaints from constituents if it can be demonstrated that none of their Ward Councillor(s) has responded at all to a request for action).

2.2.6 To consider whether methods for citizens to formally engage with its Council are made as simple and effective as possible through the provisions within the Council Constitution for petitions, questions attendance at meetings etc.

(**NOTE**: No formal review of this term of reference was undertaken. However, the submission of petitions and questions to Area Committees was considered as part of the witness interviews (Paragraphs 4.2.1, 4.3.1 and 4.5.1); and the Working Group also considered attendance statistics for all of Sefton's Area Committees, together with statistics relating to questions asked during the Public Forum, since their inception in 2001 and ending following the 2016/17 cycle (Paragraph 5 (c)).

2.2.7 To consider how section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding would be spent in a revised Area Committee structure

(**NOTE**: regarding Section 106 monies, currently the trees and greenspace element is allocated by Ward Councillors in consultation with the Head of Communities. Non trees and greenspace Section 106 contributions can only be allocated in accordance with the terms

of the Section 106 Agreement. This policy could remain in place in any new structure.
Regarding CIL this can only be spent on infrastructure projects contained in the Regulation 123 list which is determined by Cabinet. In areas covered by Town or Parish Councils, the Town or Parish Council is guaranteed a proportion of CIL to independently spend on infrastructure).

2.2.8 To consider the remit of Area Committees

(**NOTE**: consideration of the remit and operation of Area Committees was given in all aspects of the Working Group's deliberations)

3.0 METHODS OF ENQUIRY

3.1 Consideration of the issues raised in the report submitted to the Cabinet on 'The Future of the Area Committees' on 23 June 2016

3.2 Research on the 'Community Champions' role of Councillors

3.3 Interviews with local Advisory Group Members of Area Committees, Heads of Service and other Council Officers

4.0 KEY WITNESSES

Members of the Working Group gathered evidence when Members had the opportunity to interview key witnesses, various Officers and Partners.

The following Paragraphs provide a summary of the points raised in discussions held with key witnesses who had been invited to attend Working Group meetings. A detailed transcript of the witnesses' comments can be found as Appendix 2 in Paragraph 10 to this Final Report.

4.1 LOCAL ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS, PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES SERVING ON AREA COMMITTEES AND IAN WILLMAN, SERVICE MANAGER, NEIGHBOURHOODS

Members raised the following issues with Barbara Rouse - South Sefton Area Committee Local Advisory Group Member, Parish Councillor Anne Ibbs and Parish Councillor Kevin Sharpe – Central Sefton Area Committee Parish Council Representatives, Parish Councillor Gerry Lee - Chair of the Sefton Area Partnership of Local Councils and Central Sefton Area Committee Parish Council Representative, Sir Ron Watson and Sandra Cain – Southport Area Committee Local Advisory Group Members and Ian Willman, Service Manager, Neighbourhoods:-

4.2 **What do you see as the main benefits of the current system and main dis-benefits?**

4.2.1 **Benefits**

The system allows the public to engage with Members and officers and to raise issues of concern via the Public Forum. Also, Parish Council representatives can escalate matters to Sefton Councillors.

4.2.2 **Dis-benefits**

The Area Committees are geographically too large which results in residents feeling disenfranchised due to long distances having to be travelled to venues; and that issues being discussed are not of relevance to the majority of attendees.

Not enough powers are delegated to the Committees and they should meet on a more frequent basis.

4.3 **Do you think that the meetings are well attended by a range of members of public and was it easy for them to participate in the meeting?**

4.3.1 **Benefits**

It was acknowledged that Southport Area Committee had a much better public attendance level than the other two Area Committees and more questions were raised during the Public Forum.

4.3.2 **Dis-benefits**

Since the establishment of the larger Area Committee system public attendance levels had dropped dramatically in the Central Sefton and South Sefton areas with a resultant reduction of Public Forum questions being asked in these areas.

If greater publicity was given to the Area Committee meetings then public attendance and participation may improve.

4.4 **What would you change regarding the operation of Area Committees? What works well, what not so well?**

4.4.1 **Works well**

There was a good Police/partner relationship and the Police participation at meetings worked well.

4.4.2 **Works not so well**

The Area Committees were too large and not enough time was available to debate issues adequately.

There was a reduction in the number of members of the public attending the Area Committees which led to poor engagement with the Council.

Area Committees met too infrequently.

There should be more delegation of powers to Area Committees.

4.5 **What business do you initiate via Area Committees and do you think that this business could be discharged in another way?**

4.5.1 More powers need to be devolved to Area Committees.
The current system is too big and impersonal – local residents need to be able to see their local Councillors making decisions affecting their localities.
Business is initiated by raising issues during the Public Forum to stimulate debate.
Items placed on agenda if a common theme is identified via contact with local residents.
Budget monitoring reports submitted to each meeting but is there really a need to do this?
Social media could be used to disseminate information more effectively.

4.6 **What channels of communication do you have into the democratic process and what do you consider could be used in the absence of Area Committees?**

How do you think social media could be used to provide information to local communities?

4.6.1 The following channels of communication were cited as ways to access the democratic process:-

- Surgeries
- Home visits
- Social media use such as Facebook, twitter, Streetlife, Formby bubble, “fix my street”, SIMON (Sefton Interactive Maps Online), Merseynow (Merseyside Police), virtual libraries (as used by the North Meols Library Association) and Instagram
- Parish Council noticeboards
- Phone calls
- emails

4.6.2 It was acknowledged that social media was a good tool to provide information to residents; but that we should be wary that a one size fits all approach is not always the best option, particularly bearing in mind that not all residents are comfortable with the use of ICT.
Suggestions made to improve communications included the use of local media, the creation of individual Ward Facebook accounts, the webcasting of meetings, improvements to the Council’s website and the introduction of a case management system for Members.

4.7 **Apart from Area Committees what other methods do you use to conduct your Ward work and obtain the views of your constituents? (NOTE: this question was only asked to Parish Council Representatives)**

4.7.1

- Parish Council meetings open to the public and the use of Public Fora at the meetings
- Parish Council notice boards
- Canvassing
- Formby Hub
- Neighbourhood Plans
- Letters/flyers
- Face to face meetings

4.8 **Do you think the Operational Group could fulfil some of the roles of Area Committees? Have you any examples? (Note: this question was only asked to Ian Willman)**

4.8.1 Not all areas currently used Operational Groups and the appetite of Members in particular areas clearly differed on the use of such Groups. However, Operational Groups had potential but there would need to be a real drive of participants if they were to replace Area Committees.

4.9 JAN MCMAHON, HEAD OF STRATEGIC SUPPORT

Members raised the following issues with Jan McMahon, Head of Strategic Support:-

4.10 **How could modern Councillors operate by the use of enhanced or improved surgeries, events or public meetings?**

- Use of the Communications team to help elected Members promote Council work that they have been involved with. If a Councillor has a newsworthy item the Team can advise on how best to promote it
- Social media was now growing in popularity and could be more actively used by Members and tips were provided regarding such use
- The Council's website is a great way to for Councillors to promote their activities
- E-mails could be used and an e-newsletter or blog could be created by Councillors
- Use of the recently approved dedicated news website and the printed newsletter that would be published twice a year
- Use of the Accessible Communications policy

4.11 **How do you think Councillors could improve their partnership working arrangements?**

- By getting involved in local fora e.g. Dementia forum
- Use of established Operational Groups that were attended by many partners

4.12 **At the last meeting of the Working Group witnesses made various comments about social media and website issues. How could the Council's website or social media use be enhanced to improve the public's interaction with the Council and its elected Members?**

- Lots of detail to this question had been provided previously and described in 4.10
- The Council's website was a continual work in progress and improvements would always be sought including the updating of Ward Profiles
- Webcasts — some local authorities use webcasts but analysis of figures show that the uptake of usage by the public is low and therefore would not be recommended as a way to improve public engagement.

4.13 **Could a "report it once" system be introduced?**

Sefton currently applies the "tell it once initiative". Customer interface issues would have to be looked at regarding "report it once" but some systems are very expensive. All things could be possible but account must be taken of cost issues particularly bearing in mind the financial situation of the Council.

4.14 **From your experience of the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel what do you consider could be done to improve Members' engagement with their constituents?**

- Lots of detail to this question had been provided previously and described in 4.10
- By the use of social media, partnership work and becoming involved in "Friends of" groups
- By building and maintaining a positive relationship with reporters Members can establish themselves as a valuable and credible contact for news and comment
- Surgeries are a good facility to have face to face contact with constituents

4.15 **What methods of engagement do you consider that the public prefer?**

- Difficult to answer as the situation is different for different people but often busy lives need the immediacy and quick response of social media
- Surgeries offer that real chance for a one to one and for people feel listened to
- Attendance at partnership and community events can help to engage with the public
- we must acknowledge that one size does not fit all

4.16 MICHAEL MAINWARING, WORKFORCE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

Members raised the following issue with Michael Mainwaring, Workforce Learning and Development Manager:-

What training could be offered to Members to support and implement any proposals suggested by Jan McMahon?

- More information is required before training is developed, i.e. is it to improve face to face communication, e-learning or workshops. Once this has been established then evaluation exercises can be undertaken to ensure we have met our outcomes
- Regarding social media training, the best way to deal with this is to use experimental training i.e. use social media in a live environment
- E-learning packages
- Political party group champions could assist those group members not so familiar with ICT issues

5. MEETING TO DISCUSS AND CONSIDER INFORMATION REQUESTED AT PREVIOUS MEETINGS

In accordance with a previous decision of the Working Group information was sought on the following:-

(a) how Area Committees operated in Merseyside, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire. The following local authorities had responded to the request for information:-

- Bolton
- Bradford
- Bury
- Kirklees
- Leeds

- Liverpool City Council
- Manchester City Council
- Oldham
- Trafford
- Wigan

To gauge the operation of Area Committees outside of the north of England a small number of London boroughs identified below were also contacted:-

- Barnet
- Brent
- Harrow
- Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

(b) the views of the Local Government Association and Merseyside Police on the operation of Area Committees.

The Local Government Association

The Local Government Association responded to the request for its views by indicating that Sefton should appreciate that when it comes to decisions relating to the appropriateness of different governance structure models, the LGA does not have a view as this is an issue for local determination and very much informed by local and political factors. However, the LGA did offer help by signposting the Council to a number of different examples from other local authorities who have recently considered area committees.

The LGA indicated that within the North West region, Pendle Borough Council undertook a review of its neighbourhood working arrangements quite recently; and although a small district, there may be useful learning in this.
Wirral also had a review which considered whether to initiate an Area Committee governance structure a few years ago though this finally concluded that a large scale change would not be appropriate.
Slightly further afield, the LGA was also aware that Durham County Council has a number of long-standing Area Action Partnerships which have been reviewed in recent years.

Contact was been made with the three Councils referred to above and the information set out below details findings.

Pendle Borough Council

Contact has been made with Pendle Borough Council and the

Council is considering proposals to review its whole Committee (not just Area Committee) functions; but it is not anticipated that this review will take place for some time. For information, the following link provides details of the most recent meeting of one of Pendle's five Area Committees. It appears that Pendle's Area Committees have more functions delegated to them than Sefton's which include power to determine planning and licensing functions.
http://www.pendle.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/2261/nelson_committee

Wirral MBC

Contact has been made with Wirral Council. In April 2013 Wirral replaced their 11 Area Committees with four Constituency Committees co-terminus with constituency boundaries. The Constituency Committees are statutory area committees, which are committees established to discharge functions in respect of part of the local authority area and whose members are elected for divisions or wards falling wholly or part within that part. They are each be supported by a Strategic Director assisted by dedicated officers.

A copy of Wirral Council's terms of reference for Constituency Committees can be obtained here

Durham County Council

Perusal of the Council's website shows that Durham County Council has 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAP) that cover all areas of the county with the aim of helping deliver high quality services and give local people and organisations a say on how the Council's services are provided.

Each of the 14 AAPs is made up of an area forum and an area board to identify and tackle issues in local communities.

- An area forum: for all-comers to meet twice a year to consider issues such as agreeing priorities for the area and reviewing progress of the partnership board.
- An area board: 21 elected members who will meet at least six times a year to discuss how the AAP is progressing against its action plan, manage spending and work with local partners around service issues. Each board is made up of elected members from organisations such as the county council, town and parish councils, and health, police and fire brigade, community and voluntary groups, and the public.

Each AAP puts plans and actions in place to deliver services where

they are needed most and has a budget of £120,000 for local projects and investments, as well as an administration budget for staffing. This is in addition to a neighbourhood budget which each county Councillor has to use for local initiatives, informed by the AAPs.

The County Council's webpage providing more information on AAPs can be accessed using the following link http://www.durham.gov.uk/article/1960/About-AAPs

The LGA concluded that although not specially relating to the operation of Area Committees, guidance was referred to that the LGA and Centre for Public Scrutiny produced in 2014 on practical steps for councils when considering changes to their governance arrangements. A copy of this guidance can be viewed here

Merseyside Police

Contact had been made with Merseyside Police seeking their views on the operation of Sefton's Area Committees and the views of the three Neighbourhood Inspectors Phil Hatton, Ian Jones and Graham Fisher are set out below.

Neighbourhood Inspectors had a good relationship with Councillors and Police attendance at Area Committees could be deemed unnecessary as elected Members were well aware how to raise directly any issues that they had with Neighbourhood Inspectors and their colleagues without having to wait for a quarterly meeting of the Area Committee. Furthermore, it was commented on that there was a very low public attendance at Area Committee meetings; that it was very time consuming for the staff to produce written reports detailing crime patterns/figures; and that the Police were the only emergency service required to attend Area Committee meetings.

(c) attendance statistics at previous meetings of Area Committees. Attendance statistics for all of Sefton's Area Committees, together with statistics relating to questions asked during the Public Forum, since their inception in 2001 and ending following the 2016/17 cycle of meetings can be obtained by accessing the links below.

A snapshot of the statistics shows that since the inception of Area Committees in 2001 and ending following the 2016/17 cycle of meetings:-

- 770 Area Committee meetings have been held
- The total public attendance at the meetings was 12,981 with an average attendance of 17 members of the public per

meeting

- 4643 questions had been raised during the Public Forum with an average of 6 questions per meeting being asked
- All Area Committees were better attended by the public and more Public Forum questions were asked when Area Committees were smaller, i.e. before the establishment of South Sefton and Central Sefton Area Committees in 2013 and Southport Area Committee in 2004
- Southport was the best attended Area Committee in the current system with an average of 26 attendees per meeting
- Southport North was the best attended Area Committee in the former system with an average of 27 attendees per meeting
- Southport generated the most Public Forum questions in the current system with an average of 10 questions per meeting
- Litherland and Ford generated the most Public Forum questions in the former system with an average of 8 questions per meeting

- Central Sefton
- Crosby
- Formby
- Linacre and Derby
- Litherland and Ford
- Sefton East Parishes
- South Sefton
- Southport
- Southport East
- Southport North
- Southport South
- St. Oswald and Netherton and Orrell
- Combined Area Committee Statistics

(d) During the course of the Working Group's deliberations various pieces of correspondence had been received or referred to and which Members have considered. This information is detailed below:-

- Letter from Mr. Bernard Powell regarding the future of Southport Area Committee - click here
- Email from Ian Cowell, Clerk of Ince Blundell Parish Council making suggestions regarding operation of the three Area Committees - click here
- Neighbourhood and community engagement Councillor

workbook. This Local Government Association workbook has been designed as a learning aid for elected members with the aim of serving as a useful reminder of some of the key skills, approaches and tactics involved in neighbourhood and community engagement - click here

Following consideration of the above documentation Members made the following observations:-

- The “soapbox slot” adopted by Brent was a good idea
- It must be acknowledged that this review was not aimed at cost cutting but to ensure an improvement in accessibility of Councillors and communities and wider engagement
- A general consensus was that the Central Sefton and South Sefton Area Committees did not operate well; with one reason cited as the three distinct communities of Maghull, Formby and Crosby having no geographic/community link. It was also mentioned, as an example, that it was unfair for example, Maghull Councillors to vote on issues affecting Crosby or Formby and vice-versa. Different models could be adopted for different areas
- Police involvement in Area Committees was reducing; although police consultation with Members and their communities was improving via neighbourhood meetings. However, public attendance at Police “have your say” meetings was not very good. A good practice example was cited whereby Police Officers and/or PCSO’s attend Members’ surgeries and that this provided good information exchange between Members, Police and local residents
- A question was asked whether Operational Groups covered all areas of the borough. Jill Coule indicated that the Southport and Litherland and Ford areas had taken the opportunity to establish Operational Groups. A Member indicated that the Southport Operational Group worked well but that the remit of the Group and the times at which its meetings are held needed to be reviewed
- That the effectiveness and frequency of meetings for Area Partnerships was variable
- The main issue is to improve public engagement to enable residents to contact and interact with their elected Members; and the Bournemouth model of Area Fora was mentioned as a good example of a way to do this
- A question was asked about how the formal business of Area Committees, for example traffic regulation orders, would be conducted if Area Committees were to cease. Jill Coule indicated that her consultation report to Area Committees in December 2015/January 2016 set out possible new places for Area Committee responsibilities to be carried out. The report suggested that traffic regulation orders could be dealt with by the Licensing and Regulatory Committee

- Concern was expressed about the current review of the venues used for meetings of the Planning Committee. Jill Coule indicated that she understood that the principle of alternating the venues of meetings between Southport and Bootle would be maintained

The Working Group resolved that:-

(1) it be agreed that due to budgetary and staff resource constraints the "scaling-up" of the current Area Committee operation was not an option;

(2) decisions must be taken locally and tailored and flexible approaches must be adopted for any new models of community engagement to suit different areas of the borough; and

(3) Members be requested to submit their suggested models of community engagement and that such models be considered at the next meeting of the Working Group.

6. MEETING TO DISCUSS MEMBERS' PROPOSALS

The Working Group considered proposals submitted from Members as summarised below. The full detail of the proposals is set out in Appendix 3 in Paragraph 11 to this Final Report.

6.1 Councillor Simon Jamieson

The Area Committees should revert to their smaller more local size particularly in areas such as Formby, Crosby etc. The smaller Area Committee model would allow more engagement and interaction at local level between Members and their constituents.

6.2 Councillor Sue McGuire

The Liberal Democrat group believes that local areas understand best the issues that concern them and that localism is an important aspect of our democratic traditions.

As such the Liberal Democrat group propose to give local area committees the final say on their future.

In all cases increased use of online and social media is to be welcomed as an extra method of communication with the public. The Liberal Democrats additionally support plans for an escalation project available to residents when councillors fail to respond to communication.

It is anticipated that different area will opt for different governance structures going forward and this is to be celebrated.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the opportunity to review the remit of the

Area Committee and believe that the following should be considered:

Review current funding of Area Committees with the possibility that costs associated with the meetings are met from ward budgets
The inclusion of a “soap box” platform to provide residents with the opportunity to share their views and raise concerns outside the current constraints of the area committee remit.
To engage with other partner organisations in a constructive manner both statutory bodies i.e. Council, Police, NHS but also voluntary groups within the community.
Submission of questions as part of The Public Forum should be reviewed to allow questions from the floor and questions to other partner organisations
Area Committees should be included as a platform for residents to engage with the Council consultation process.

1. TRO's and other petitions raised by residents remain within the remit of the Area Committees
2. Further powers should be delegated to Area Committee to devolve decision making to the local communities.

Proposals specifically for Southport Area Committee

1. Southport Area Committees retain its title.
2. The meetings are held in Southport Town Hall Council Chamber
3. Council Officers take minutes.
4. Officers are requested to be present by the Chair for relevant items on the agenda.
5. The Town Wide fund is replaced by a new fund made up of funds taken from wards that have more than £10K unspent by the end of the year.
6. The number of meetings should not be reduced.

6.3 Councillor Carla Thomas

Many witnesses indicated a wish for a return to the former Area Committee structure of seven smaller, more localised Area Committees meeting on a more frequent basis. However, the Working Group, at its meeting held on 19 April 2017 agreed that due to budgetary and staff resource constraints the “scaling-up” of the current Area Committee operation was not a viable and sustainable option. Bearing in mind the generally negative comments of witnesses to the current structure, together with the poor community engagement and attendance at meetings, a new model of Member engagement with their constituents, community groups, partners, businesses, private sector organisations, the voluntary, community and faith sector and Parish Councils agencies is required. Accordingly, it is recommended that:-

(1) The current Area Committee system in Sefton cease;

(2) The current responsibilities of Area Committees be transferred to the Committees as detailed in Appendix 1 attached to the report of the Head of Regulation and Compliance considered by the three Area Committees during the December 2015/January 2016 cycle;

(3) Three Constituency Fora be established covering the Bootle, Sefton Central and Southport Constituencies with the following terms of reference:

A. To engage with local residents, community groups, partners, businesses, private sector organisations, the voluntary, community and faith sector and Parish Councils particularly in relation to the Sefton 2030 vision for the borough;

B. In areas covered by Parish Councils, to work closely with such Parish Councils and the Sefton Area Partnership of Local Councils by promoting and enhancing the Parish and Town Council Charter for Sefton

C. To consider complaints from constituents if it can be demonstrated that none of their Ward Councillor(s) has responded at all to a request for action;

D. To meet a minimum of twice per year ; and

E. To determine, with the consent of the three Ward Councillors, the devolved allocation of Ward funds on local priorities that would not otherwise be funded by Council budgets; that this funding continue to be administered by the Head of Communities; and any Ward budget over £10,000 not allocated at the end of the Municipal Year be transferred to the Cabinet Member – Communities and Housing for inclusion in the Community Transition Fund;

(4) The Head of Communities to support the operation of the Constituency Fora;

(5) The Head of Strategic Support to provide support on public engagement and consultation issues to the Constituency Fora;

(6) Subject to operational requirements the use of Council buildings be allowed to host the Constituency Fora; and

(7) To assist the role of Constituency Fora Operational Groups be established if deemed necessary by local Ward Members (in those areas where currently none exist) to work with partner agencies in their localities.

These proposals represent the majority view of the public in that it offers a meeting forum for their locality/community but would remove/significantly reduces the formality.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) consider such submissions detailed in paragraph 6 above and determine the most appropriate course of action thereon.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS

In producing this report on the review the findings of the public consultation exercise undertaken on the role of Area Committees, acknowledgements and thanks are attributed to the following individuals for their time and input:-

- Barbara Rouse - South Sefton Area Committee Local Advisory Group Member, Parish Councillor Anne Ibbs and Parish Councillor Kevin Sharpe – Central Sefton Area Committee Parish Council Representatives, Parish Councillor Gerry Lee - Chair of the Sefton Area Partnership of Local Councils and Central Sefton Area Committee Parish Council Representative and Sir Ron Watson and Sandra Cain – Southport Area Committee Local Advisory Group Members
- Ian Willman, Service Manager, Neighbourhoods
- Jan McMahon, Head of Strategic Support
- Michael Mainwaring, Workforce Learning and Development Manager

Thanks must also go to the Members of the Working Group who have worked hard and dedicated a great deal of time to this review, namely:-

Councillor Carla Thomas, Lead Member, Area Committees Working Group

Councillor Simon Jamieson

Councillor Sue McGuire

Councillor Dave Robinson

Councillor Les Byrom

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.

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

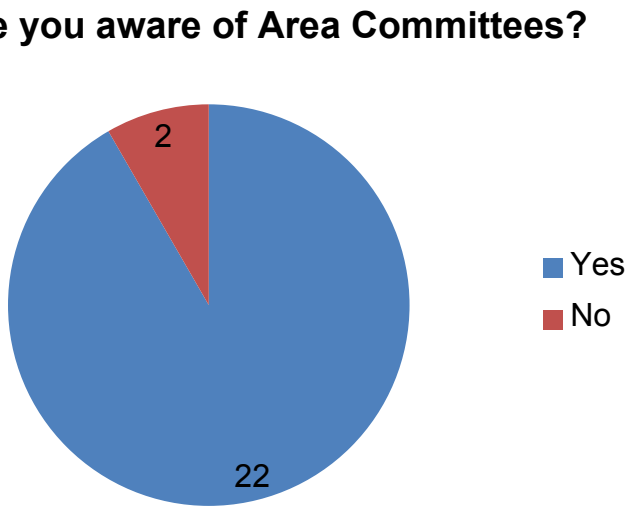
- Some common barriers to raising issues and talking to the Council and Councillors include not getting a response and responses taking a long time and information on the website not being up to date.

Key findings from the on-line survey

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

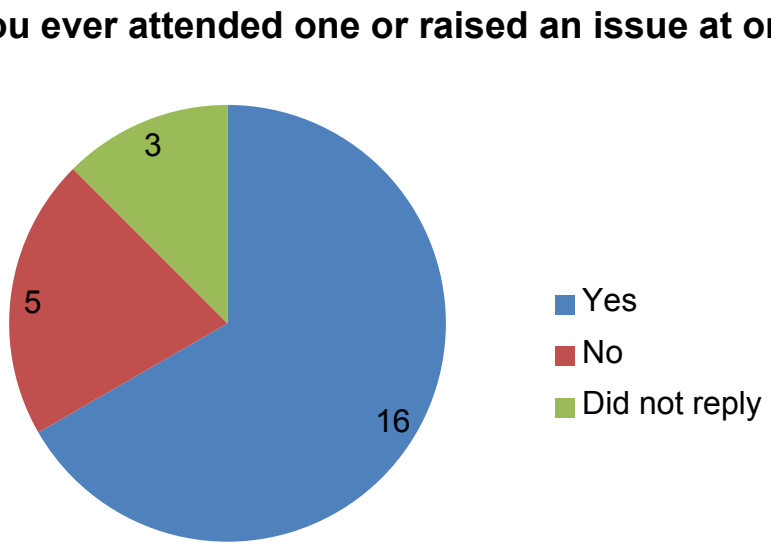
1. Are you aware of Area Committees?

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?

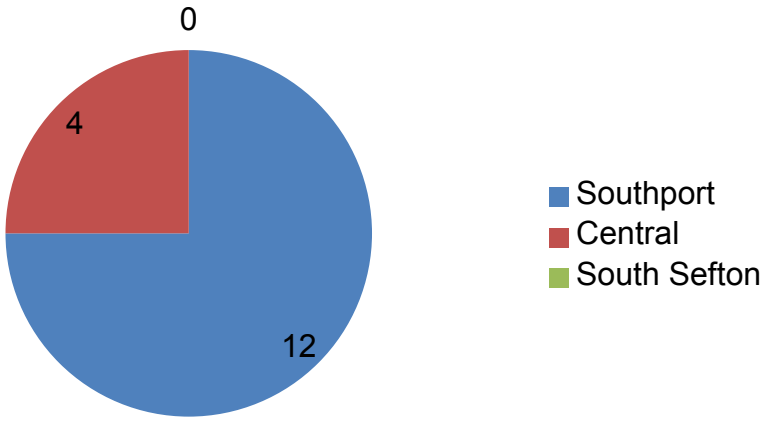
16 people (67%) had attended an Area Committee or raised an issue, 5 people hadn't and 3 people didn't post a reply to this question.



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**.

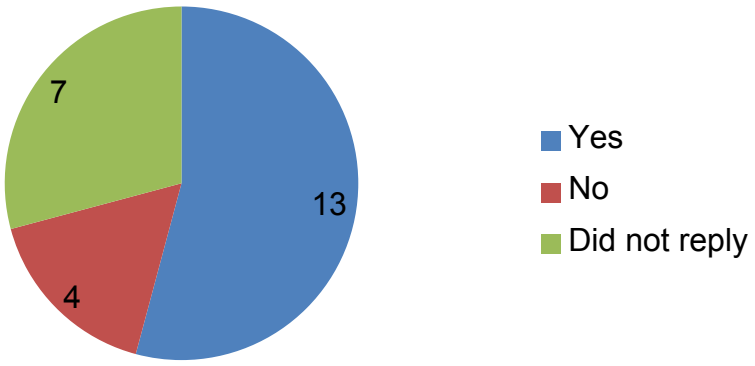
Which Area Committee have you attended?



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

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?



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?

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.

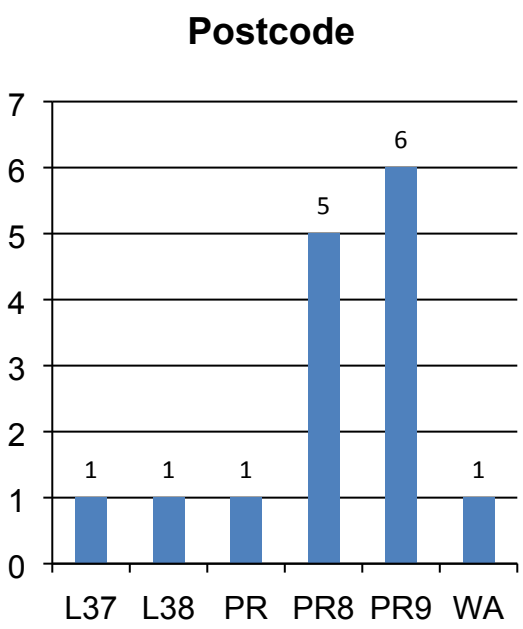
- The Liverpool City Model based on Wards with Cllrs supported by teams is, in my opinion, the way to go.

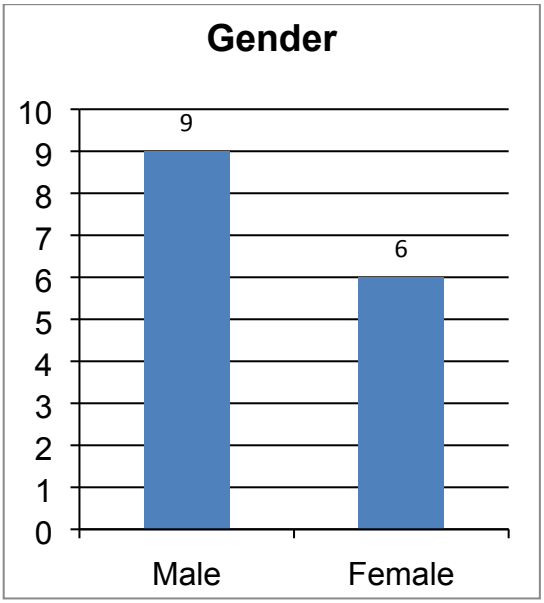
- Area Committees provide an important means of finding out about actions being taken by the Council or proposed to be taken. There is the ability for the Area Committee to invite partner agencies or others to make presentations to the Committee explaining local developments and how the public can assist. The local media attend the Committee and are able to then publish information put into the public domain at Committee. The

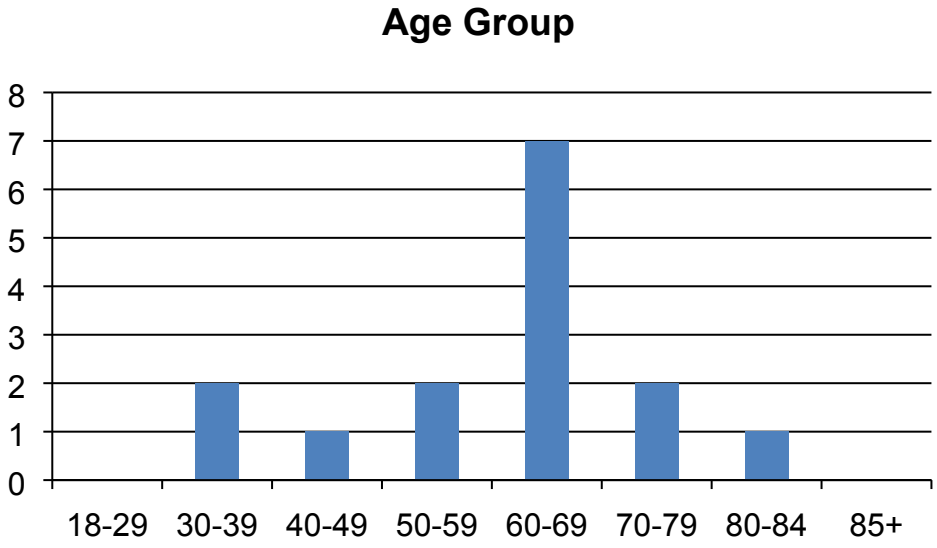
ability to raise questions by members of the public and obtain the views not only of the relevant officers, but importantly that of elected Councillors; Some Areas do not want to have another formal area of local government and the Area Committee to some extent provides the necessary local contact. Area 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 how the budget will be spent? • Look at each area individually, not as a collective
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	
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	0	N/A

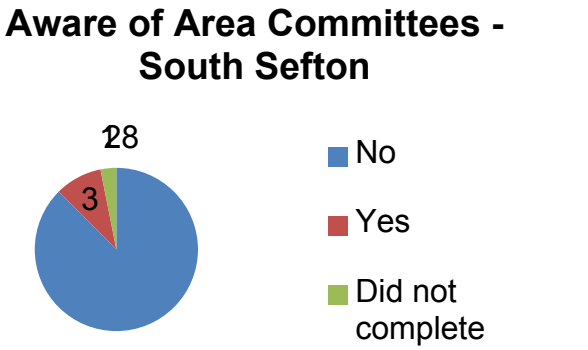
– Maghull (11.00am – 12.00 noon)		
Wednesday 16 March 2016 – Formby (2.00pm – 3.00pm)	1	• Person who attended had previously been a Parish Councillor and was aware of and had attended/taken part in Area Committee meetings • The current set up is too big – it operated much better when Formby had its own 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

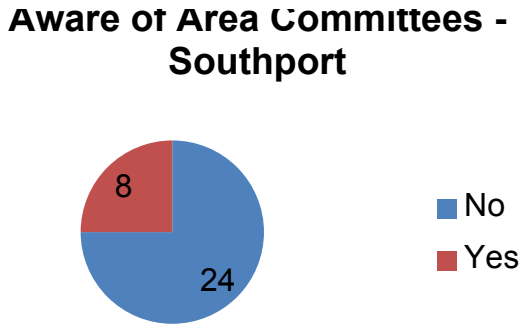
Key findings from Vox Pop (Street Surveys)

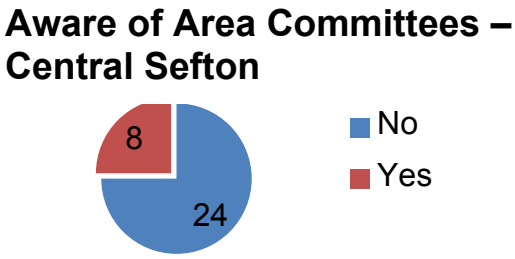
The Street Surveys took place in each of the five townships of the Borough. They took place during the day in locations with high footfall. The aim was to randomly poll the same number of people from the areas represented at an Area Committee composition. In total 96 surveys were completed: 32 from each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

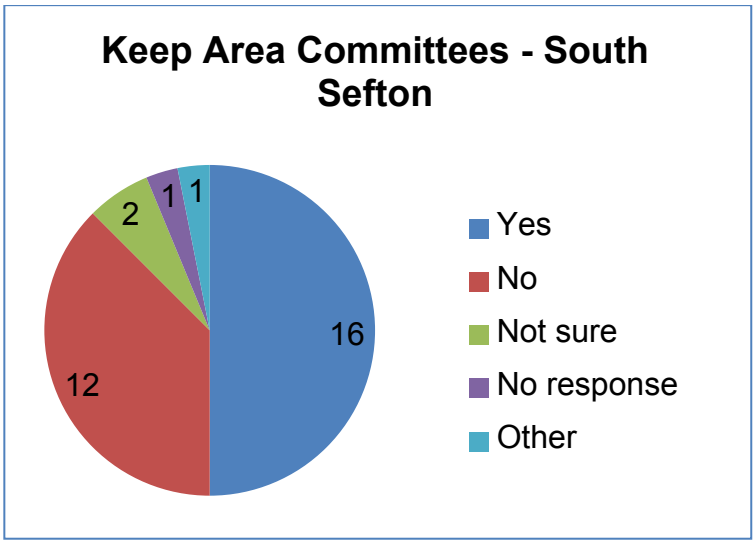
Awareness of Area Committees

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.

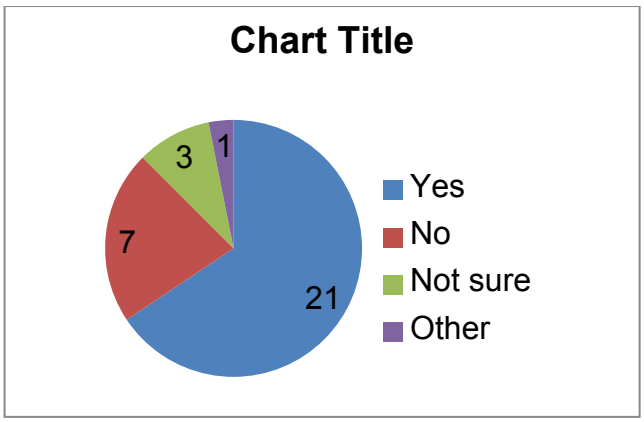


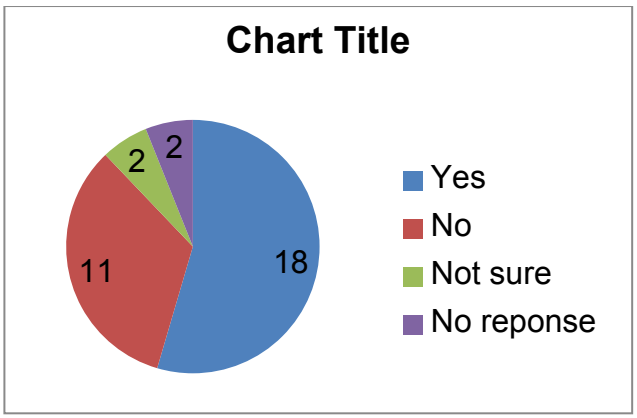






Of the 96 respondents, 55 (57%) people said they would like to keep the Area Committees and 29 (30%) people said they shouldn't be kept. The highest response to keep the Area Committees came from respondents in the Southport Area and the highest response to not keep them was from the South Sefton area.





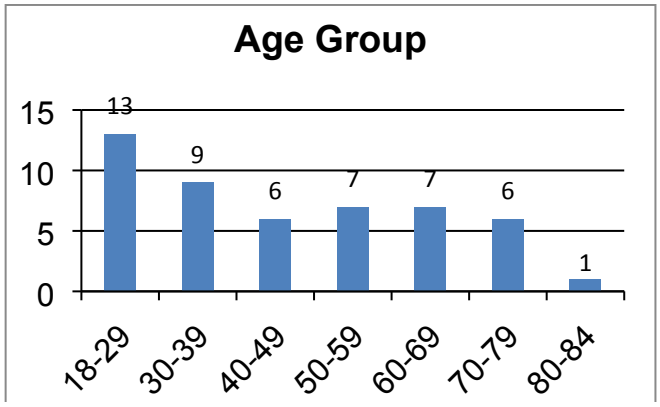
Preferred way of contacting the Council and Councillors

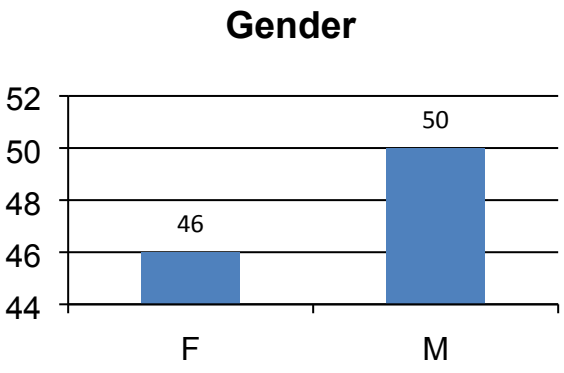
Participants who took part in the street surveys were asked for their preferred way of contacting the Council and Councillors if the Area Committees were not to exist. A wide range of responses were given but some of the common methods include:

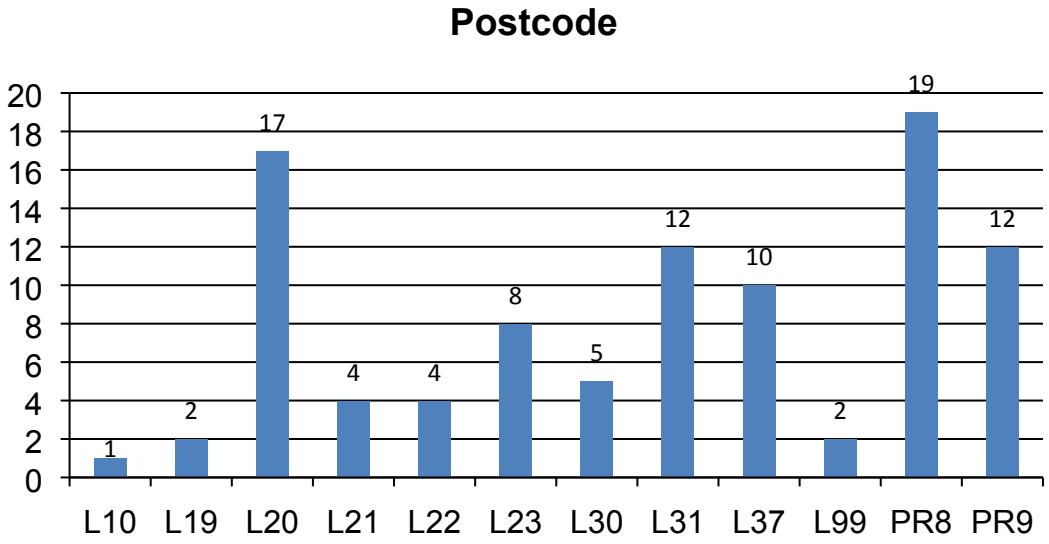
- Ward Councillors (and through surgeries) and local MP's
- Email
- Visit to the One Stop Shop
- Phone

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!

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.

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:

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, xxxxxxxxxxxxx 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.

10. APPENDIX 2 – WITNESS INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

10.1 LOCAL ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS, PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES SERVING ON AREA COMMITTEES AND IAN WILLMAN, SERVICE MANAGER, NEIGHBOURHOODS

Members raised the following issues with Barbara Rouse - South Sefton Area Committee Local Advisory Group Member, Parish Councillor Anne Ibbs and Parish Councillor Kevin Sharpe – Central Sefton Area Committee Parish Council Representatives, Parish Councillor Gerry Lee - Chair of the Sefton Area Partnership of Local Councils and Central Sefton Area Committee Parish Council Representative, Sir Ron Watson and Sandra Cain – Southport Area Committee Local Advisory Group Members and Ian Willman, Service Manager, Neighbourhoods:-

10.2 **What do you see as the main benefits of the current system and main dis-benefits?**

10.2.1 Sir Ron Watson — benefits — Area Committees were the only forum where the public could attend and ask questions of the Police. Guest speakers and presentations by officers also allowed engagement with the public and to contribute to consultation exercises.
Dis-benefits — Area Committees should meet on a more frequent basis; and more powers should be delegated to them and local elected Members.

10.2.2 Anne Ibbs - There was no benefit to the current Area Committee structure. The Area Committees were too big; it was difficult for local residents to travel long distances to venues in other parts of the Area Committees boundary due to poor public transport links; and accordingly, local people felt disenfranchised. Before the creation of the 3 Area Committees, the system was much better as Area Committees were smaller and that allowed local Members to take local decisions. The general consensus was that we should revert to the previous system.

10.2.3 Barbara Rouse — There was no benefit in the creation of larger Area Committees. Under the previous system, Linacre and Derby Area Committee met much more frequently and generated a greater local public attendance. More time was available for local elected Members to spend time on local issues pertinent to local residents.

10.2.4 Sandra Cain - I have not attended any Area Committees other than Southport but I feel that Southport is well attended and offers a good way for the public to engage with Councillors; and provides a mechanism for questions to be raised during the Public

Forum. It may be helpful if Local Advisory Group Members could meet prior to the meeting to discuss the agenda in a similar manner to political group meetings.
A question was asked how many Local Advisory Group Members does Southport have and do they represent Wards? Sandra Cain responded that there were six Local Advisory Group Members and they represented sectors rather than Wards, for example, she represented the voluntary, community and faith sector and there was also representation from young advisors and Homewatch.

10.2.5 Kevin Sharpe — a benefit of the current system is that it allows the escalation of Parish Council matters to a Sefton Council platform.
Dis-benefits are that the Area Committee can become a "talking shop" and strict agenda management is required to ensure that the meeting runs smoothly; and posed a question what would be put in the place of Area Committees if they were disbanded?

10.2.6 Ian Willman - There was some good engagement in certain areas, namely Southport, where there was a good level of public attendance but not in others. For instance, South Sefton Area Committee had a low level of attendance that wasn't conducive to getting a local perspective.
Area Committees provided a good opportunity for residents to challenge officers over strategy.
Area Committees were overly bureaucratic which did not fit with the Localism agenda.
Should the public be given more time to address Members of the Committee?
The size of the new Area Committees made them less flexible
Frequency of meetings — residents don't wait for a quarterly meeting to resolve an issue they would contact Members or officers direct

10.3 **Do you think that the meetings are well attended by a range of members of public and was it easy for them to participate in the meeting?**

10.3.1 Anne Ibbs — Under the new system the Central Sefton Area Committee was not well attended unlike the former Formby Area Committee that was well attended. More public questions were received at the former Formby Area Committee and it was more of an occasion. The public were reticent to speak at the larger Central Sefton Area Committee.

10.3.2 Sir Ron Watson — the Southport Area Committee was well attended and topical or controversial issues generated a greater attendance. There was a good public engagement at Southport

Area Committee and it was easy for the public to participate as the attendees generally understood the Public Forum procedure. The Police attendance was particularly helpful to the public. The Area Committee was better attended than more formal Council meetings.

10.3.3 Councillor McGuire — no real publicity was given regarding Area Committee meetings and greater attendance would be achieved if we could raise more awareness of the meetings.

10.3.4 Barbara Rouse — totally agreed with previous comments. More public attendance was generated at the smaller Linacre and Derby Area Committee and there was a greater attendance when a pertinent topic was on the agenda. There was a public perception that there was a hidden agenda or pre-determined outcome at Area Committees. A journalist from the Bootle Times used to always attend Linacre and Derby Area Committee meetings and report on decisions taken.

10.3.5 Gerry Lee - agreed with previous comments. Melling was a semirural
area and the attendance of Melling residents at Central Sefton Area Committee had dropped-off. Feedback from SALPC was that there was a general discontent because Parish Council representatives could not get in touch with their Sefton Ward Councillors.

10.3.6 Councillor Robinson — advertising was the key issue. We need to advertise Area Committees better and inform how the public could get involved in the Area Committee process i.e. regarding the Public Forum and what they could or could not involve Area Committees in, for example, planning matters.

10.3.7 Kevin Sharpe — the Central Sefton Area Committee is not well attended by the public but it is easy for the public to participate although even more opportunities could be afforded to the public to get involved. The Area Committee plays an important role because it allows the public to see local democracy working.

10.3.8 Ian Willman - Meetings were well attended in Southport but not elsewhere in the borough
The creation of three Area Committees produced large geographical areas and boundaries. This in turn raised issues about public transport links to Area Committee venues which could have a detrimental impact on public attendance at meetings. Furthermore, regarding the size of the Area Committees, was a Formby resident interested in what was happening in Waterloo? The timing of the meetings may inhibit attendance of the public

10.4 **What would you change regarding the operation of Area Committees? What works well, what not so well?**

10.4.1 Councillor Robinson — we need to re-visit the way we currently operated. The current Area Committees were too big and not enough time was made available for debating issues. But the key issue was could we revert to the previous system within current financial constraints?

10.4.2 Councillor Jamieson — the current Area Committee system was too big and there was no meaningful public engagement.

10.4.3 Anne Ibbs — the Area Committee system needed to be really local or be abandoned. There was insufficient time made available for public participation. The Council did not consult with Parish Council's enough and Parish Councils had lots of good views and advice.

10.4.4 Sir Ron Watson — the frequency of the meetings needed to be increased. The delegation of powers could be reviewed to enable more locally made decisions and thereby reduce the burden on decision making by other Sefton decision making bodies. There could be a devolvement of local governance in Southport.

10.4.5 Councillor McGuire — the reduction in the frequency and the increase in the size of Area Committees was a result of a Council budget decision. Area Committees were too structured and the procedure for allowing members of the public to ask questions should be relaxed. Local people needed to be involved in the local decision making processes and accordingly more powers should be devolved to Area Committees. People needed to be given answers to their questions even if it was not the answer they wanted to hear and more officer engagement at Area Committee meetings could help to do this.

10.4.6 Barbara Rouse — Police participation at Area Committees worked well. A downside was that the meetings were too formal with no flexibility which led to attendees losing interest.

10.4.7 Gerry Lee — agreed with previous comments in that there was a common dissatisfaction with the new Area Committee structure. There was a good Parish Council/Sefton Council officer relationship but the Parish Council/Sefton Ward Councillor relationship had diminished. We needed to revert to the old Area Committee system.

10.4.8 Kevin Sharpe — stricter agenda timetabling should be introduced and more time should be given to strategic matters facing the borough. At times the meeting is a low level "talking shop" with lots of Parish Council tittle-tattle.

10.4.9 Ian Willman - A redesign of the agenda with more focus on public engagement and involvement in decision making.
There was a good Police/partner relationship.
There was good Public Forum participation at Southport Area Committee.
Local Advisory Group Members, on occasions, appeared to raise their own agenda issues rather than fulfilling their advisory role.

10.4.10 Councillor McGuire — more debate on Committee reports was Required.
Residents could be allowed to suggest future agenda items to increase public engagement — how residents initiate consideration of items at Area Committees needed to be looked at.

10.5 **What business do you initiate via Area Committees and do you think that this business could be discharged in another way?**

10.5.1 Councillor Robinson — there should be a reduction in the size and an increase in the frequency of Area Committees.

`10.5.2 Councillor Jamieson — more power should be devolved to Area Committees so that local people see local Councillors making local decisions.

10.5.3 Anne Ibbs — the current Area Committee structure was too big and impersonal and people felt disenfranchised. The old system was much better. On a positive there was good police participation at Area Committees.

10.5.4 Sir Ron Watson — I initiated business at Area Committees by asking questions during the Public Forum which could then lead to debate. Also, I give my local knowledge on Area Committee agenda items.

10.5.5 Councillor McGuire — the Liberal Democrat group would hold discussions in the run up to and Area Committee meeting. If a common theme was apparent via local residents contact with Ward members then an item would be placed on the agenda and appropriate officers asked to attend the meeting. A suggestion in the Cabinet report was that if Area Committees were abandoned then the Licensing and Regulatory Committee could discharge some functions such as traffic regulation orders. This raised the concern about public engagement as it was not considered that

L&R would support adequate public engagement, for example, how would local residents raise questions under the current governance structure? A whole system review would be needed.

10.5.6 Barbara Rouse — the Area Committee system has got to be kept local. The Bootle Action Group had recently been set up to improve local amenities and environmental issues; and the Action Group regularly contacted the Council to complain about fly-tipping and refuse related problems. Social media could be a good tool to disseminate information but caution was also expressed that sensitivity was required as there were downsides such as abusive comments.

10.5.7 Gerry Lee — the Council needed to create a higher profile of its Area Committees; advertisements should be placed in local newspapers about what is happening.

10.5.8 Kevin Sharpe — I have recently instigated a lot of work in opposition to a wind farm development affecting the local community.
I would need someone to explain to me what the various alternatives are as to whether business could be discharged in another way.

10.5.9 Ian Willman - Budget monitoring and area management reports were submitted to each meeting and colleagues had an input into the Public Forum process. But do we need to report budget monitoring issues bearing in mind colleagues were in very regular contact with local Members?
We need to be more social media savvy to disseminate Information.
Could information be provided to Members in a better way rather than via quarterly Area Committee reports?

10.6 **What channels of communication do you have into the democratic process and what do you consider could be used in the absence of Area Committees?**

How do you think social media could be used to provide information to local communities?

10.6.1 Councillor Robinson — I hold regular surgeries, undertake home visits, use social media and look at the Bootle Action Group site on a daily basis, all of which helped me to perform my role as a Ward Councillor. I would not like to see the demise of Area Committees as it would reduce an opportunity for face to face engagement with constituents. It would be helpful if we could increase social media engagement.

10.6.2 Councillor Jamieson — some Councillors don't go out of their way to engage with local residents. There should be a greater devolution of powers to Area Committees so that local residents could engage in the decision making process. I use facebook, twitter, streetlife, Formby bubble to engage with residents. I'm strongly of the opinion that we should not do away with Area Committees.

10.6.3 Anne Ibbs — Area Committees should not disappear and at meetings we need to ensure that everyone felt that they had had their say. Some Ward Councillors need to become more engaged. Officers of the Council were very helpful when contacted. Regarding engagement, the Parish Council meetings were open to the public, notice boards provide information, parish Councillors knock on residents' doors to canvas opinions and currently, there was lots of consultation going on regarding the Neighbourhood Plan. Regarding social media the Parish Council used Formby bubble as it had a great relevance to local people. More localism was required.

10.6.4 Sir Ron Watson — Ward Councillors were exceptionally helpful when contacted. Southport Area Committee worked very well because it served an identifiable community. Area Committee functions could be dispersed to other Committees but this would reduce public engagement. We need to differentiate between responsibilities i.e. was it a Parish Council or Sefton Council issue to resolve and a clarification of duties would be helpful. Social media could have significant downsides as there could be generational gaps, the affordability of ICT equipment by some residents and some people's wariness of online use. We would always need traditional methods of communication and the local press could be used to help with this.

10.6.5 Councillor McGuire - in the absence of Area Committees social media could be used. Sefton has 13,000 twitter followers so Sefton could broadcast to 13,000 people; Facebook was a good communication tool but difficulties could arise if strong, adverse comments were posted; however it was a good communication channel and therefore should be used. Fix my street was also a good tool as was SIMON (Sefton Interactive Maps Online).

10.6.6 Barbara Rouse — I use Merseynow from Merseyside Police to obtain information. We needed to revert to the old Area Committee structure as I built up lots of good officer contacts and relationships at these fora. Should there also be checks on whether Councillors were doing their work?

10.6.7 Gerry Lee — I had been a Parish Councillor for 15 years and it was very evident that there was a bias of Sefton Councillors against Parish Councillors. If Area Committees were removed Sefton would be very undemocratic.

10.6.8 Kevin Sharpe — the Parish Council feeds into the Sefton Area Partnership of Local Parish Councils (the 10 Parishes).
In the absence of Area Committees I'm not sure how Parish Councils would escalate issues.
The Parish Council uses streetlife; but caution was given that due to generational issues lots of older people do not use social media and therefore could miss out on information if it is only provided by social media, Our Parish Council noticeboard is a great way to provide information to the local community as it is sited in a prominent location.

10.6.9 Sandra Cain — agreed with lots of the points raised by Parish Councillor Sharpe in respect of the questions above; and commented in general by making the following points:-
• Information could be provided by virtual libraries such as that operated by the North Meols Library Association
• Facebook was a good tool and resource for the dissemination of information but there were some negative aspects
• The Southport Area Committee agenda was well managed and could be used to escalate issues to other bodies
• An example of good Area Committee led partnership working was cited regarding the refurbishment of a shrimping cart public art feature; and Mrs. Cain indicated that she did not think that this issue could have been resolved without the involvement of the Area Committee
• Southport in Bloom issues were also supported by the Area Committee
• She had personally discussed the Sefton 2030 Vision with many neighbours and colleagues and urged them to submit their views into the consultation exercise
• She has not seen any viable alternatives to the current Area Committee structure
• Area Committees should be promoted within local communities to involve greater local public participation
• Other groups should be invited to participate in the Area Committee process such as the Southport Business Improvement District
• She was very appreciative of the support afforded to her from elected members and officers; and that she had built up a good working relationship through her Local Advisory Group member role.

10.6.10 Councillor Robinson indicated that at South Sefton Area

Committee, since the introduction of the new arrangements, the Committee's workload was so large that not enough time could be given to serious issues; and Ward Councillors felt that this was not productive. He asked whether this was the case in Southport Councillor McGuire responded that it was not the case at Southport Area Committee but acknowledged that when the Area Committees were smaller they were better attended by the public. A big problem of Southport Area Committee was its infrequency of meetings.

10.6.11 Ian Willman - Lots of avenues were used such as emails, telephone calls,
Cabinet Member Briefings
Sometimes a phone call is a great way of communication because it was more personal
Attendance at Operational Groups

10.6.12 Councillor Jamieson — communications between the Neighbourhoods Team and elected Members was excellent but we need to improve our communication with the public. This could be achieved by the use of social media and the Internet and via walkabouts with elected Members in their wards
We should be wary of the one size fits all approach
We had lots of information and the task was to pull it all together
The use of the Council's social media really needs improving
Elected Members always worked well with partners but we needed to enhance our communications with them to ultimately improve the situation for our local residents

10.6.13 Ian Willman - The use of social media needed to improve.
We could potentially have facebook accounts for individual Wards
The improved use of twitter and potentially each Ward could have its own account.
Instagram
We feel that the Council website could be improved.
Ward profiles needed to be more user friendly.
Webcasting of meetings to enable local residents to view Committees from home.

10.6.14 Councillor McGuire — agreed with the comment about the Council website and considered that it was not at all attractive or Engaging.

10.6.15 Councillor Thomas — a case management system for Members using a "traffic light approach" would be a great idea.

10.7 **Apart from Area Committees what other methods do you use to conduct your Ward work and obtain the views of your constituents? (NOTE: this question was only asked to Parish Council Representatives)**

10.7.1 Anne Ibbs - the Parish Council meetings were open to the public, notice boards provide information, parish Councillors knock on residents' doors to canvas opinions, face to face meetings.

10.7.2 Anne Ibbs/Gerry Lee — Public fora were held at all Parish Council meetings allowing the public to make a contribution. Appropriate Sefton Ward Councillors were invited to all Parish Council meetings but they very rarely attended.

10.7.3 Anne Ibbs - we have the Formby Hub and Councillor Page helps with this.

10.7.4 Gerry Lee — Melling Parish Council were currently in the final stages of its Neighbourhood Plan which had involved great engagement and public consultation and this had had the benefit of bringing the community together. Ingrid Berry and her colleagues in the Planning Service had provided great input into the Neighbourhood Plan process.

10.7.5 Councillor McGuire — Southport did not have a Parish or Town Council and if the Area Committees were disbanded Southport would feel democratically violated.

10.7.6 Kevin Sharpe — the Parish Council notice board is very important for relaying information to constituents and this facility should not be underestimated; church meetings; word of mouth; email; public meetings; distribution of letters/flyers through letter boxes. Finally, Parish Councillor Sharpe referred to the changing democratic structure across Merseyside relating to the Liverpool City Region; and acknowledged that if Liverpool as a city did well then other boroughs would benefit from spin offs. He indicated that Area Committees could identify some big issues of concern to them that could then be referred on to the new City Region Mayor to resolve.

10.8 **Do you think the Operational Group could fulfil some of the roles of Area Committees? Have you any examples? (Note: this question was only asked to Ian Willman)**

10.8.1 Ian Willman -There was a push on the use of Operational Groups but not all areas opted to use them. Southport, Litherland and Ford and Formby (Operation Beachsafe) currently used Operational Groups. The appetite of Members in particular areas clearly differed on the use of such Groups.

We have set things up rigidly and bureaucratically and this could prohibit public involvement.
We had lots of fora outside of the operation of Area Committees where we engaged with the public.
Operational Groups had potential but there would need to be a real drive of participants if they were to replace Area Committees.

10.9 JAN MCMAHON, HEAD OF STRATEGIC SUPPORT

Members raised the following issues with Jan McMahon, Head of Strategic Support:-

10.10 **How could modern Councillors operate by the use of enhanced or improved surgeries, events or public meetings?**

Sefton has a communications team whose job it is to represent the council from a corporate point of view, reflecting the policy decisions made. By law, they are not allowed to write or send out press releases on behalf of individual Councillors, but they can still help elected Members promote Council work that they have been involved with. If a Councillor has a newsworthy item our Communications Team can advise on how best to promote it.

Social media is now growing in popularity and could be more actively used by Members; and the following tips are very helpful regarding such use:-
• Be human: be approachable in your language and tone; behave online as you would in person.
• Be engaging: respond to questions and join in when you can move the conversation on or help.
• Be professional: remember that you represent your council, so be aware of how your public voice comes across.
• Share and attribute: you can share what others have posted but it is polite to acknowledge and attribute where this has come from.
• Go to where your audience is: if the section of the population you want to connect with is on a particular platform, forum or group, join it.
• Content is king: by creating sharable and engaging content you can contribute to the conversation and be heard.
• Be authentic: don't pretend to be something you are not.
• Be strategic: plan ahead — who do you want to engage with, why and how? What do you want to achieve?
• The internet is forever: be aware that what you post now could be found in years to come

The use of social media for the reporting of the proceedings is permitted

during public Council meetings as long as this causes no disruption to the running of meeting. In line with national legislation, the filming and recording of public meetings is also permitted, again provided the activity does not disrupt proceedings. Anyone wishing to do so is asked to inform the Democratic Services Team 24 hours in advance to ensure any necessary arrangements can be made.

The Council's website is a great way to for Councillors to promote their activities. The website has 100,000 user visits per month and the Council has 13,500 twitter followers. As an example, the Events page on the website could be used to advertise Members' surgeries.

E-mail could also be used and an e-newsletter or blog could be created by Councillors.

Training will be needed for Members and staff and such training is currently being developed by the Communications Team in conjunction with Michael Mainwaring the Workforce Learning and Development Manager.

Jan McMahon concluded by advising of the recently published decision by the Cabinet Member — Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services to adopt a new approach to how the Council communicates with residents and businesses in line with others across the city region and the UK and the proposal to launch a dedicated news website and publish a printed newsletter twice a year.

A question was asked whether the Council monitored local websites such as the Bootle Action Group who may post incorrect information regarding Council activity.
Jan McMahon indicated that this was not done because by becoming involved may inflame a situation and the resource is not available to undertake this activity. However, the Council did respond to some facebook and twitter posts. Regarding twitter, the Council took part in the LGA “tweetathon” event on 15 November 2016 and circulated lots of facts about the Council; and raised Sefton's profile nationally and had re-tweets on the Guardian twitter feed and the LGA. This strengthened the fact that lots of people use social media.

A comment was raised that at a recent meeting of the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel the responses to the consultation exercise on the Bootle Investment Strategy were considered; and that the response rate was very low compared to Crosby and Southport. Could social media be used for such consultation exercises.
Jan McMahon indicated that consultation exercises could be and had been undertaken using Facebook and twitter during Imagine Sefton 2030. It was recognised that we need to develop a programme of training for both Members and officers in such techniques.

A question was asked about the disadvantages experienced by people who did not use ICT.
Jan McMahon indicated that the Council were aware of such problems and had an officer who liaised with hard to reach groups. The Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services has recently approved the Accessible Communications policy.

Councillor McGuire stressed her concern that social media was being touted as an alternative to the operation of Area Committees and that this was something that she disagreed with; and that Area Committees are used as a platform and could not be replaced by social media.

10.11 **How do you think Councillors could improve their partnership working arrangements?**

By getting involved in local fora e.g. Dementia forum; by the use of established Operational Groups at which local Councillors, officers and representatives from community and residents groups meet on a regular basis and could also be attended by police, local schools, housing associations and other partners; and that each area could look at its own priorities and share good practice.

A comment was made that the Southport Partnership was attended by many partners and that the partnership base was widening.

Jan McMahon indicated that through the Vision consultation and engagement process good community contacts had been made, for example, with the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.

10.12 **At the last meeting of the Working Group witnesses made various comments about social media and website issues which are set out below. How could the Council's website or social media use be enhanced to improve the public's interaction with the Council and its elected Members?**

Lots of detail to this question had been provided previously and described in 4.10.
The Council's website was a continual work in progress and improvements would always be sought.
Ward Profiles are currently being updated.
Webcasts — some local authorities use webcasts but analysis of figures show that the uptake of usage by the public is low and therefore would not be recommended as a way to improve public engagement.

10.13 **Could a "report it once" system be introduced?**

Sefton currently applies the "tell it once initiative". Customer interface issues would have to be looked at regarding "report it once" but some systems are

very expensive. All things could be possible but account must be taken of cost issues particularly bearing in mind the financial situation of the Council.

A question was asked whether there was a system of tracking issues online. Jan McMahon indicated that there was no such system. A "My Account" system was in place but this was not used often with 70% of accounts dormant.

A comment was made about the reporting of fly-tipping issues online and following an unsatisfactory response, the escalation of the problem by making a phone call to the Council. It had to be acknowledged that sometimes it was preferable to speak to an operator rather than using the online service.
Jan McMahon indicated that some of our web processes are "end to end" and others generate emails and that this is where problems may occur; whilst some are process and resource dependent.

10.14 **From your experience of the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel what do you consider could be done to improve Members' engagement with their constituents?**

Lots of detail to this question had been provided previously and described in 4.10.
By the use of social media, partnership work and becoming involved in "Friends of" groups.
Also, Local journalists are always looking for good stories. By building and maintaining a positive relationship with reporters Members can establish themselves as a valuable and credible contact for news and comment. The Communications Team can also be used to promote the good work being done in Wards.
Surgeries are a good facility to have face to face contact with constituents and if as mentioned previously, if we are told of the surgery details then they can be published on the events page of the website.

10.15 **What methods of engagement do you consider that the public prefer?**

This is difficult to answer as the situation is different for different people but often busy lives need the immediacy and quick response of social media. However, surgeries offer that real chance for a one to one and for people feel listened to. Attendance at partnership and community events can help to engage with the public. However we must acknowledge that one size does not fit all.

A comment was made that there was more time for public engagement and questions at the previous, smaller Area Committees; and the view was that South Sefton and Central Sefton did not work so well but what alternative system could be put in place that the Council could realistically afford.

A further comment was made that we have three separate Area Committees with differing needs; and acknowledging that one size does not fit all, it was stated that Southport did not wish to lose its Area Committee. Alternatives could be sought but the same alternative may not be applicable to all three Area Committees.

Jill Coule concluded in response to a question from Cllr Robinson that options could be tailored to each area; but questioned whether Area Committees were the best way to transact business. The review was not established as a way to save money but as a mechanism to find the best way to transact local business and improve communication and engagement with local communities.

10.16 MICHAEL MAINWARING, WORKFORCE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

Members raised the following issue with Michael Mainwaring, Workforce Learning and Development Manager:-

What training could be offered to Members to support and implement any proposals suggested by Jan McMahon?

Jan McMahon has covered some of these points already; but more information is required before training is developed, i.e. is it to improve face to face communication, e-learning or workshops. Once this has been established then evaluation exercises can be undertaken to ensure we have met our outcomes.

Regarding social media training, the best way to deal with this is to use experimental training i.e. use social media in a live environment.

A comment was made that e-learning packages were a good tool because members could undertake the training at their own convenience.

The use of political party group champions would also assist those group members not so familiar with ICT issues, particularly older group members.

11. APPENDIX 3 - MEMBERS' PROPOSALS

11.1 Councillor Simon Jamieson

The Area Committees should revert to their smaller more local size particularly in areas such as Formby, Crosby etc. The smaller Area Committee model would allow more engagement and interaction at local level between Members and their constituents.

11.2 Councillor Sue McGuire

The Liberal Democrat group believes that local areas understand best the issues that concern them and that localism is an important aspect of our democratic traditions.

The Liberal Democrat group acknowledges the results of the consultation on the future of the area committees and recognises that a 'one size fits all solution' would be deeply unsatisfactory.

As such the Liberal Democrat group propose to give local area committees the final say on their future. However it is clear that options need to be provided to deal with the specific concerns raised by the consultation.

The consultation seems to suggest the South Sefton Area Committee has the highest percentage of people believing the committee to be not necessary. While we believe it should be down to the committee themselves to determine how to react to the consultation the case for change is most compelling in South Sefton.

The Southport Area Committee is the best attended committee of the council and has significant popular support both through the consultation and through its democratic mandate having been created through public referendum. Southport Area Committee should be retained though elements of its form could be modified.

The area committee covering Sefton Central has, in its modified form, proved problematic and potential solutions to this so far have all carried revenue implications.

The Liberal Democrat group proposes the following options be presented to area committees for consideration.

Satus Quo – The area committee is best to be retained in its current form

Devo Min – The Area Committee should become a fully open public forum held once a quarter.

Devo Max – Area committee to be retained in its current form with long term plans to devolve further powers to the committee starting with Street Scene.

Abolition – Abolish the area committee but retain the ward budget.

A further consideration should be given by the members of the Sefton Central

Area Committee as to whether a return to the previous system of governance. Should the committee choose to return to the previous system it may need to utilise some of the ward budgets to meet the revenue costs.

In all cases increased use of online and social media is to be welcomed as an extra method of communication with the public. The Liberal Democrats additionally support plans for an escalation project available to residents when councillors fail to respond to communication.

It is anticipated that different area will opt for different governance structures going forward and this is to be celebrated.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the opportunity to review the remit of the Area Committee and believe that the following should be considered:

3. Review current funding of Area Committees with the possibility that costs associated with the meetings are met from ward budgets
4. The inclusion of a “soap box” platform to provide residents with the opportunity to share their views and raise concerns outside the current constraints of the area committee remit.
5. To engage with other partner organisations in a constructive manner both statutory bodies i.e. Council, Police, NHS but also voluntary groups within the community.
6. Submission of questions as part of The Public Forum should be reviewed to allow questions from the floor and questions to other partner organisations
7. Area Committees should be included as a platform for residents to engage with the Council consultation process.
8. TRO's and other petitions raised by residents remain within the remit of the Area Committees
9. Further powers should be delegated to Area Committee to devolve decision making to the local communities.

Proposals specifically for Southport Area Committee

7. Southport Area Committees retain its title.
8. The meetings are held in Southport Town Hall Council Chamber
9. Council Officers take minutes.
10. Officers are requested to be present by the Chair for relevant items on the agenda.
11. The Town Wide fund is replaced by a new fund made up of funds taken from wards that have more than £10K unspent by the end of the year.
12. The number of meetings should not be reduced.

11.3 Councillor Carla Thomas

The Working Group has sought the views on the operation of Sefton’s Area Committees of various Local Advisory Group Members and Parish Councillor representatives serving on Area Committees; together with the views of the Council’s Head of Strategic Support, the Workforce Learning and

Development Manager and the Service Manager - Neighbourhoods. The views were obtained at witness interviews held on 18 November and 9 December 2016. The detailed comments of the witnesses are included in the Minutes of the meetings incorporated into the Working Group's Final Report. The general thrust of the comments was that the Area Committee system is not working well because:-

- The Area Committees were geographically too large and residents had no real interest in the majority of issues discussed at meetings as such issues were not relevant to their communities*
- The large size of the Area Committees meant travelling to meetings, particularly by public transport, was problematic
- Over the years there had been a sharp reduction in the numbers of local residents engaging in the Council's Area Committee system
- The format/rules of the Area Committee were not conducive to member's being accessible to the public, to public engagement and did not seem to be meeting public expectations.
- The police had confirmed through their response to the consultation that they were not minded to continue to attend the area committee meetings as they were not viewed as effective ways to communicate with local residents.
- Members were dissatisfied with being asked to consider a TRO for a locality that did not relate directly to the ward/locality they represented.
- The Council per se was using a variety of methods and routes to secure public consultation and less frequently/not using the Area Committee forum accordingly.

It was acknowledged that Southport witnesses considered that the Southport Area Committee geography was not too large and that Southport was considered to be a cohesive locality.

Many witnesses indicated a wish for a return to the former Area Committee structure of seven smaller, more localised Area Committees meeting on a more frequent basis. However, the Working Group, at its meeting held on 19 April 2017 agreed that due to budgetary and staff resource constraints the "scaling-up" of the current Area Committee operation was not a viable and sustainable option. Bearing in mind the generally negative comments of witnesses to the current structure, together with the poor community engagement and attendance at meetings, a new model of Member engagement with their constituents, community groups, partners, businesses, private sector organisations, the voluntary, community and faith sector and

Parish Councils agencies is required. Accordingly, it is recommended that:-

(1) The current Area Committee system in Sefton cease;

(2) The current responsibilities of Area Committees be transferred to the Committees as detailed in Appendix 1 attached to the report of the Head of Regulation and Compliance considered by the three Area Committees during the December 2015/January 2016 cycle;

(3) Three Constituency Fora be established covering the Bootle, Sefton Central and Southport Constituencies with the following terms of reference:

A. To engage with local residents, community groups, partners, businesses, private sector organisations, the voluntary, community and faith sector and Parish Councils particularly in relation to the Sefton 2030 vision for the borough;

B. In areas covered by Parish Councils, to work closely with such Parish Councils and the Sefton Area Partnership of Local Councils by promoting and enhancing the Parish and Town Council Charter for Sefton

C. To consider complaints from constituents if it can be demonstrated that none of their Ward Councillor(s) has responded at all to a request for action;

D. To meet a minimum of twice per year ; and

E. To determine, with the consent of the three Ward Councillors, the devolved allocation of Ward funds on local priorities that would not otherwise be funded by Council budgets; that this funding continue to be administered by the Head of Communities; and any Ward budget over £10,000 not allocated at the end of the Municipal Year be transferred to the Cabinet Member – Communities and Housing for inclusion in the Community Transition Fund;

(4) The Head of Communities to support the operation of the Constituency Fora;

(5) The Head of Strategic Support to provide support on public engagement and consultation issues to the Constituency Fora;

(6) Subject to operational requirements the use of Council buildings be allowed to host the Constituency Fora; and

(7) To assist the role of Constituency Fora Operational Groups be established if deemed necessary by local Ward Members (in those areas where currently none exist) to work with partner agencies in their localities.

For further Information please contact:-

Paul Fraser

Senior Democratic Services Officer

Telephone: 0151 934 2068

E-Mail: paul.fraser@sefton.gov.uk

Sefton Council

Overview & Scrutiny