

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Council	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	16 July 2015	
TITLE:	Options to strengthen community representation and civic governance within Bath	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: None		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 This report invites the Council to endorse the establishment of a new Bath City Forum to strengthen community representation and civic governance in Bath.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To note the evidence base prepared by the Council's Working Group on options to strengthen community representation and civic governance within Bath
- 2.2 To endorse the establishment of a Bath City Forum, as set out in in Paragraph 5.10 of the report, as an advisory body only with no delegated powers
- 2.3 To agree the draft Terms of Reference of the Bath City Forum set out in Appendix 1
- 2.4 To authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with Group Leaders, to make any minor amendments to the Terms of Reference, with any significant changes being reserved for Council
- 2.5 To thank the members of the working group for their deliberations
- 2.6 To thank local residents and parish councils for their contributions to the process

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 The Bath City Forum will operate within existing budgets. No Council budgets will be delegated and support for the operation of the Forum itself will be met from existing staffing resources.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The Council established a member working group to examine a range of options, including use of specific powers such as those to undertake Community Governance Reviews and to establish Area Committees with delegated functions. In this instance, however, the recommendation to Council is that a Bath City Forum be established with no delegated powers and with a purely advisory function.

5 THE REPORT.

- 5.1 Council in May 2014 resolved that

A cross-party working group (with a membership proportionate to the make-up of the Council) be established to consider, with officer support, options to strengthen community representation and civic governance within Bath, and to report back on these options, including a preferred option (with proposed Terms of Reference) to the July Council meeting, or if this is not possible then no later than the September Council meeting, for consideration.

- 5.2 The working group met 7 times from May to July 2014, and published an Interim report for consultation which can be found here.

http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/interim_report_july_2014_5.docx

- 5.3 This and the consultation findings along with recommendations were reported to September Council which resolved:

1. To note the interim report of the working group to strengthen community representation and civic governance within Bath and thank its members for their work so far;
2. To agree that the working group continue its work, based on the next steps set out in paragraph 5.8 of the report, to provide an evidence base for the newly-elected Council in May 2015 to determine this issue; and
3. To agree to extend the life of the working group, as currently comprised, to deliver the remit set out in 2 above.

- 5.4 Subsequent to this the working group has met a further 6 times. At its most recent meeting, held on 19th June, the reconvened working group received the full, collated, "Evidence Base" which had been brought together following the Group's work. The Evidence Base includes:

- A range of briefing notes concerning options under consideration, including Parishing of Bath and the creation of Area Forums
- Results of a consultation survey which had been undertaken on the interim report prepared in the Summer of 2014
- Information received from other Councils including a presentation on Weston Super Mare Town Council and the Winchester Town Forum

5.5 The working group also heard the results of a “Voicebox” survey which had been undertaken on this issue. This has now been added to the Evidence Base.

5.6 The Working Group then considered the issue in the light of all the evidence and the wide range of information issues and options generated by this process. The Group also heard that there would be a session on this topic at the Bath City Conference on 10th July 2015 and that the intention was to report to Council as swiftly as possible.

5.7 The working group heard consideration of two broad alternative approaches which had been identified through the process. These were:

- Bath could be “parished”, as with the area outside of Bath. This could be done through either one parish for the whole of the City of Bath, or a number of parishes covering smaller areas of the City. There would be separate elections for any new council and parish councils levy additional Council Tax for extra local services.
- Alternatively, there could be an “Area Forum” set up for Bath which would not need a separate council and councillors, but could draw from existing Bath councillors who sit on Bath & North East Somerset Council.

5.8 The group heard that each of the options has “pros” and “cons”. For example

- Parish councils can secure many local benefits but establishing them requires a “Community Governance Review” which would take several years. They also require an additional amount of Council Tax to be raised to run the parish council and deliver local services.
- An Area Forum can be set up immediately but does not establish a new body with separately-elected members and thus the ability to raise a Parish precept. It would not have the same powers as a Parish Council

5.9 In discussion, it was noted that the Connecting Communities Forums were now operating in North East Somerset and that there was an opportunity to draw from this experience to establish a Bath City Forum with a similar collaborative, advisory purpose but tailored to the needs of the City. For example, it was noted that there are 32 B&NES elected members in Bath and that a number of representatives may therefore need to be selected from these to serve on the Bath City Forum. As with the Connecting Communities Forums, the Bath City Forum would not be given a budget and therefore would not have spending powers. However, the Bath City Forum could have an effective advisory role, particularly if the knowledge and representation of elected members could be complemented by co-opted Forum members representing themes such as business, education, World Heritage, residents’ groups and city centre organisations.

5.10 In the light of these discussions, the Leader of Council indicated to the working group that he was minded to request officers to bring forward a proposal to Council at the earliest opportunity to establish a Bath City Forum. It is now therefore proposed to Council that this Bath City Forum be established, to operate within the Framework set out below:

- For the purposes of Council procedures, the Bath City Forum shall be considered the Bath City equivalent of a Connecting Communities Forum, providing a mechanism for collaboration between communities and public bodies in the City. A key objective will be to improve the engagement of Bath & North East Somerset Council and its partners with local communities to better address City issues and priorities.
- The Bath City Forum's membership shall comprise
 - 12 elected Bath & North East Somerset councillors, representing Bath City wards and not serving in the Council's Cabinet, in the following proportion:

Conservative Group- 5

Liberal Democrat Group- 4

Labour Group- 1

Green Group- 1

Independents & Village Voice Group- 1
 - One member of the Cabinet to ensure effective linkages between the Forum, with other cabinet members attending as observers also as appropriate
 - Up to 13 members who would not be councillors but would be drawn from residents, business, heritage and other groups within the City. Since the Forum will be advisory and consultative only, with no delegated decision-making powers, co-opted members may have voting rights on the Forum. The Forum itself may choose co-opted members but using a clear process with co-opted members demonstrating willingness to work together to support the aims of the Forum.
- The Bath City Forum shall be an advisory and consultative body only and shall not have delegated funding or decision-making powers. It will not be a Neighbourhood Forum for the purposes of Neighbourhood Planning. Rather, its role will be to assist and advise the Council on issues specific to the City. For example, it may advise the Council on how best to spend that portion of Community Infrastructure Levy receipts which are used to address local priorities.
- The Bath City Forum shall elect its own Chair and Vice Chair
- The Bath City Forum shall meet three times a year with the potential to arrange other events and to hold working groups as appropriate. This is to ensure that the agenda is used to progress key themes and issues. Bath City Forum meetings will be held in public.

- The Forum will be able to establish working groups to examine particular issues in more detail, working with the appropriate Cabinet member and officers and reporting back to the Forum and Cabinet as appropriate.

5.11 Draft Terms of Reference for the Bath City Forum are attached at Appendix One. Once Terms of Reference have been agreed, the Forum will begin its work, planning agendas, co-opting members, organising work plans and establishing any working groups required.

6 RATIONALE

6.1 The working group considered a wide range of options. The option of establishing a Bath City Forum has arisen from the balance of debate, due to its ease of delivery (without need of a Community Governance Review), no requirement for additional funding to be raised and flexibility for future development.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

7.1 The Working Group considered a wide range of options which are set out in Appendix 5 of the July 2014 interim report of the working group

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The Leader of Council, Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, S151 Officer, Strategic Director Resources and Director of Strategy and Performance were consulted in the preparation of this report.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

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Background papers	Evidence Base
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	

APPENDIX ONE

Draft Terms of Reference- Bath City Forum

1. Background

- 1.1. The Bath City Forum has been established by Bath & North East Somerset Council as part of its commitment to improving engagement with partners and local communities. The Bath City Forum is part of our overall Connecting Communities framework which brings communities together to address local issues and priorities. This Framework is supported by a local Forum in each area that works to join up services and foster communication so local people receive better outcomes.

2. Name and Area of Benefit

- 2.1. The name of the Forum is the Bath City Forum. For the purposes of Council procedures this shall be considered the City of Bath's equivalent of a Connecting Communities Forum. The scope of representation and operation of the Forum shall be the following wards in the City of Bath ("the City"):

- Abbey
- Bathwick
- Combe Down
- Kingsmead
- Lambridge
- Lansdown
- Lyncombe
- Newbridge
- Odd Down
- Oldfield
- Southdown
- Twerton
- Walcot
- Westmoreland
- Weston
- Widcombe

3. Aims and Objectives

- 3.1. The aim of the Bath City Forum is to provide a mechanism for collaboration between communities and public bodies in the City to improve local engagement, join-up services and help local people receive better outcomes. It will do this by:
 - Acting as a "Champion" on behalf of the City

- Improving the engagement of Bath & North East Somerset Council and its partners with local communities to better address City issues and priorities.
 - Involving City and non-City residents and organisations, seeking their views and encouraging them to participate in projects which improve the City
 - Identifying and addressing common issues of concern across the City
 - Agreeing how organisations will work most effectively together to respond to the City's priorities and take action where appropriate
 - Influencing wider policy developments
 - Linking with relevant bodies , partnerships and projects in the City
- 3.2. The Bath City Forum shall be an advisory and consultative body and shall not have delegated funding or decision-making powers. It may assist and advise the Council on issues specific to the City such as how best to spend that portion of Community Infrastructure Levy receipts which are used to address local priorities.
- 3.3. The Bath City Forum shall not be a Neighbourhood Forum for the purposes of Neighbourhood Planning

4. Key principles

- 4.1 All members of the Bath City Forum agree to adopt the following key principles:-
- To **listen** - always being open to ideas.
 - To **prioritise** - making sure local needs come first.
 - To **join up** - working in partnership with our local communities.
 - To **work collaboratively** - helping communities find the best way to tackle local issues.
 - To **share ideas** - building on what works.

5. Membership

- 5.1 The Bath City Forum's membership shall comprise
- 12 elected Bath & North East Somerset councillors, representing Bath City wards and not serving in the Council's Cabinet, in the following proportion:
 - Conservative Group- 5
 - Liberal Democrat Group- 4

- Labour Group- 1
- Green Group- 1
- Independents & Village Voice Group- 1
- One member of the Cabinet to ensure effective linkages between the Forum,
- Up to 13 co-opted members who are not Bath & North East Somerset elected councillors but drawn from residents, business, heritage and other groups within the City.

6. Voting

- 6.1. The Bath City Forum will seek to operate by consensus wherever possible. Where there is a vote, this shall be by simple majority, subject to the quorum of the meeting being met.
- 6.2. Since the Forum will be advisory and consultative only, with no delegated decision-making powers, both Bath & North East Somerset Council elected members and co-opted members may have voting rights on the Forum

7. Recruitment of Co-Opted members

- 7.1. The Bath City Forum will adopt and use a clear process for recruitment of co-opted members. Co-opted members will be required to demonstrate their understanding of local needs and willingness to work together to support the aims of the Forum. This recruitment process will include:
 - A description of the co-optee role to be filled along with the relevant theme, outcome or priority which is being reflected in the role
 - The criteria for assessment of the role
 - An open process for publicising the role's availability
 - A process for review

8. Meetings

- 8.1. The Bath City Forum will meet three times a year, one of which meetings shall be the Annual General Meeting. A notice of each meeting will be placed on Bath and North East Somerset Council's web meeting diary. All members of the Bath City Forum will be requested to promote meetings to encourage wider engagement.
- 8.2. A quorum shall apply of one third of the extant membership

- 8.3. The Forum may arrange other events and establish working groups as appropriate

9. Chair and Vice Chair

- 9.1. The Bath City Forum will elect its own Chair and Vice Chair from its membership.
- 9.2. The Chair and Vice Chair will act independently and work on behalf of the Forum for the wider benefit
- 9.3. The Chair and Vice Chair will meet with the Bath & North East Somerset Council Sponsor to agree agendas, resolve issues and report on actions as appropriate.

10. Working Methods

- 10.1. Agendas and papers for meetings will be circulated a minimum of seven calendar days before a meeting. A record of each meeting will be taken and an Action Log kept.
- 10.2. Members of the Bath City Forum will be invited to submit agenda items to the Steering Group in advance of each meeting.
- 10.3. Every member of the Bath City Forum will be accorded the same degree of respect and consideration by all other members.

11. Agenda Planning

- 11.1. The Bath City Forum will adopt a core agenda for ordinary meetings as follows:-
- Standing Items
 - Consultation items
 - Community items
 - Area Profile and priorities

12. Area Profile

- 12.1. The Bath City Forum will establish and keep updated an Area Profile that aims to inform the priorities for the Forum.

13. Annual General Meetings

- 13.1. The Bath City Forum will hold an Annual General Meeting each year in the autumn cycle of meetings or within twelve months of the anniversary of the inaugural meeting.
- 13.2. The Bath City Forum will elect a Chair and Vice-Chair at its first inaugural meeting. Thereafter elections for these posts will take place at the subsequent Annual General Meeting.

13.3. At inaugural meeting and subsequent AGM meetings, the Bath City Forum will:-

- i. Elect the Chair and Vice Chair: If any post is unfilled, elections may take place at subsequent ordinary meetings.
- ii. Review and agree the process for co-opted membership
- iii. Agree an Agenda Plan and meetings schedule.
- iv. Agree any other working arrangements required
- v. Consider how to engage more widely, showcase initiatives and share good practice within its own area and with other areas across Bath & North East Somerset.

13.4. Voting for the Chair and Vice Chair will be available only to those existing members of the Forum, notification of which will be made in advance.

13.5. Any member may stand to be elected as Chair or Vice Chair. The existing Chair and Vice Chair may seek re-election. Nominations for Chair and Vice Chair may be received prior to and at the AGM. This includes self-nominations for both positions.

14. Working Parties

14.1. The Bath City Forum may establish from time to time working parties that will be responsible for undertaking specific topics as necessary.

14.2. Members of the working parties may co-opt individuals or organisations to join, in an advisory capacity, to support their objectives.

14.3. A record of working party meetings will be taken and reported back at the Bath City Forum meetings.