

Dover District Neighbourhood Forums

Active in your community

Protocol for the Dover District Neighbourhood Forums 2010-11

INTRODUCTION

1. Kent County Council and Dover District Council are committed to finding ways to inform, consult and involve local residents. The Dover District Neighbourhood Forums are fundamental to our approach of involving local people in shaping the places in which they live and work.
2. There are five Neighbourhood Forum covering different areas of the district (following the KCC electoral boundaries). These are:
 - o **Deal & Walmer Neighbourhood Forum:** Middle Deal, Mill Hill, North Deal and Walmer.
 - o **Dover North Neighbourhood Forum:** Aylesham, Eythorne, Great Mongeham, Guston, Langdon, Nonington, Northbourne, Ringwoud with Kingsdown, Ripple, St.Margaret's at Cliffe, Sutton and Tilmanstone.
 - o **Dover Town Neighbourhood Forum:** Buckland, Castle. Maxton Elms Vale and Priory, St.Radigunds, Tower Hamlets and Town and Pier.
 - o **Dover West Neighbourhood Forum:** Alkham, Capel-Le-Ferne, Denton with Wootton, Hougham Without, Lydden, River, Shepherdswell with Coldred, Temple Ewell and Whitfield.
 - o **Sandwich Area Neighbourhood Forum:** Ash, Eastry, Goodnestone, Preston, Sandwich, Sholden, Staple, Stourmouth, Wingham, Woodnesborough and Worth.
3. The purpose of the Neighbourhood Forums is to:
 - o Engage with local residents, businesses and other community groups in the district;
 - o Provide a key consultative mechanism between all the councils and with the public on policies, plans and strategies;
 - o Assist councillors and other agencies to listen to and respond to their communities;
 - o Discuss an issue of local importance or concern or resolve specific issues;
 - o Advise the council's cabinet and scrutiny committees on issues of interest or concern in their area

TERMS OF REFERENCE

4. The Dover District Neighbourhood Forums (Forums) shall be constituted under principles contained within the Local Government Act 2000 (i.e. similar principles to those of the Joint Transportation Boards, and will be non-statutory bodies).
5. The Forums reflect the wishes of DDC's and KCC's Executive Bodies respectively to co-operate and work together voluntarily on local public service issues within their remits.
6. The Neighbourhood Forums will be accountable in an advisory capacity to each principal Council's Cabinet in respect of their relevant responsibilities.
7. The Forums are not decision-making bodies and, as such, any recommendation made by the Forums is not binding on respective KCC / DDC Cabinets.
8. The Forums must not be used for party political purposes.
9. Each Council shall bear its own costs incurred in the operation and support of Neighbourhood Forums.
10. KCC and DDC share other responsibilities for the running of the Forums – agreed separately.

MEMBERSHIP

11. Membership of each Forum comprises elected councillors from all three tiers of local government as follows:

Forum Area	No. of KCC Representatives	No of DDC Representatives	No of T&P Representatives
Deal & Walmer:	2	2	2
Dover North:	1	1	1
Dover Town:	2	2	2
Dover West:	1	1	1
Sandwich Area:	1	1	1

- o The KCC representative is the elected councillor(s) for a Forum area.
 - o The DDC representative is nominated by the council from its ward members within a Forum area.
 - o The Town & Parish Councils will elect a member to represent them from the town and parish councils in a Forum area.
12. The nominated representatives from all three tiers will attend all of the Forum meetings in their area. DDC and the Town & Parish Councils may appoint substitutes for their councillors when necessary.
13. In the event of a vote being necessary at either the Forum, or non-public planning meetings, equal voting membership for each Forum will apply: i.e.
- o Deal & Walmer: 2 x KCC, 2 x DDC, 1 x Parish and 1 x Town
 - o Dover North: 1 x KCC, 1 x DDC, 1 x Parishes
 - o Dover Town: 2 x KCC, 2 x DDC, 2 x Town
 - o Dover West: 1 x KCC, 1 x DDC, 1 x Parishes
 - o Sandwich Area: 1 x KCC, 1 x DDC, 1 x Town & Parishes
14. The quorum necessary for a vote shall be all voting members (or their substitutes where appropriate) but a quorum will not be necessary to conduct the ordinary business of the Forum.
15. Although the Forums have nominated representatives from each of the three-tiers, **all elected members** are welcome and encouraged to attend the public meetings as part of their Community Leadership role.

CHAIR

16. The Chair and Vice-Chair of each Forum rotates between the three different levels of council on an annual basis as set out in the attached table.
17. In the event of a council not taking up its duty to provide a representative on a particular Forum that council will forfeit its place in the cycle for that year.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

18. Neighbourhood Forum meetings will be held in public and the Forums may hold joint meetings on issues of wider interest.
19. The Forums are designed to be an opportunity for two-way discussion between communities and agencies.
20. Discussions should focus on outcomes and resolutions for local communities.
21. The Dover District Neighbourhood Forum Procedure shall apply.
22. Whenever possible Forum meetings will be clerked by a Town & Parish Council with assistance from an officer of DDC/KCC. Copies of all agendas and discussion papers will be sent to Forum members at least five working days before the meeting, where possible.
23. Access to Information principles will apply to all public Forum meetings.
24. Non-public briefings may be arranged between Forum meetings for the purposes of agreeing draft notes and action points, and planning the next Forum. The voting membership of the Forum will attend these briefings.

25. All councils will be responsible for advertising the Forum meetings and distributing posters and leaflets as widely as possible.
26. **Fixed Public Meetings**
The Dover District Neighbourhood Forums will hold two fixed public meetings a year, with set agenda. The dates for these meetings should be set in advance near the start of the Neighbourhood Forum year, to be widely promoted.

You Decide - Participatory Budgeting Event

- These Forum meetings will be dedicated to the grant opportunities available through the Neighbourhood Forums. Starting financial year 2010-11, the Forums will pilot Participatory Budgeting across the whole of the district. Special “You Decide” events will be organised for the five Forum areas - these events may be combined to deliver better value for money.
- Participatory Budgeting involves communities recommending which projects are worthy of funding. As in previous years, because the funds are allocated by KCC and DDC, the respective Cabinets will need to formally approve and sign-off any recommendations as this is still public spend.
- Separate guidance exists for the Participatory Budgeting “You Decide” grant fund pilot.
- Applications forms will be available from April and the closing date for applications will give local groups over 12 weeks to submit an application form.
- Dates and details of the “You Decide” events will be confirmed as soon as possible (September / October 2010).

Annual Partners Update Event

- These Forum meetings are an opportunity for local residents to receive a verbal update from, and question, representatives of the main agencies such as Kent Police, Eastern & Coastal Kent PCT, Kent Highways etc.
- These will be held as two half-day events, covering the whole district, which will be devoted to either Urban or Rural Issues. Members of the public are welcome to attend one or both of these meetings.
- Dates and details of the Annual Partners meeting will be confirmed as soon as possible (expected to be March 2011).

27. Flexible & Responsive Public Meetings

- In addition to these fixed meetings, there is an opportunity for each of the Neighbourhood Forums to hold a further two additional meetings a year, in response to pressing **local issues** (as defined) with a maximum of 10 meetings for the whole district. This limit is due to resource and budget constraints.
- Within this number, the Forums can hold joint meetings on issues of wider interest (at the discretion of relevant Forum boards).
- Once the allocated number of meetings for the year has been reached, no subsequent requests for meetings will be approved, except in exceptional circumstances (agreed by voting members of the Forum). These Forum representatives will also need to secure additional resources to help organise and run the extra meetings.
- Please see guidance below: Calling of Flexible Meetings.

Calling of Flexible Meetings

- These guidelines are designed to filter out inappropriate requests to ensure we do not overload the Forums.
- Flexible meetings are limited to issues of genuine local interest or concern, that the Forums are best suited to deal with, or to issues where there is strong public feeling (discretionary if the issue is being addressed elsewhere).
- They set a standard framework for approaching any request with some flexibility in how issues are dealt with, as requests could potentially cover a whole range of issues.
- The Dover District Neighbourhood Forums work alongside, and with, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and other mechanisms for resolving issues of interest or concern, and it is not intended to replace or duplicate this work.
- Not all topics requiring debate and discussion are best suited to a public Neighbourhood Forum meeting. In these cases, other routes should be followed to help resolve an issue.

- These guidelines are designed to deal with a request quickly, effectively and consistently – but calling a Forum meeting may not provide an immediate solution to an issue.
- The onus is on elected councillors, as community leaders, to flag up any pressing issues of interest or concern in their communities.
- A decision to hold a public Forum meeting must be based around clearly identified community issues: What is the impact on the local community? Is a public Neighbourhood Forum meeting the best way to discuss and resolve this issue?
- Officers will filter any requests received direct from the public (using set guidelines) and forward requests needing further consideration to the Forum representatives, who are responsible for approving the holding of a flexible Forum meeting.
- The majority of the Forum representatives need to be in agreement to holding a meeting (i.e. 2 out of 3 members in the Dover North, Dover West and Sandwich Area Forums; 4 out of 6 members in the Deal & Walmer and Dover Town Forums). This will need to be confirmed by the Forum representatives to the KCC Community Engagement Manager in writing or by e-mail.
- A checklist has been prepared as a guide for Forum representatives when considering a request to hold a meeting.
- Forum representatives will consider community requests within a reasonable period of time (within 10 - 14 working days is the standard).
- The preferred way for Forum representatives to discuss any proposal is face-to-face. However, it is recognised that this may not always be feasible within a reasonable time-period and it may therefore be considered through telephone conversations or e-mails.
- If the representatives decide to call a public Neighbourhood Forum meeting, they must send a formal request to the KCC Community Engagement Manager.
- Meetings will be arranged within 28 days of the formal request being made. The meeting will be held as soon as venue and speakers' availability allows. There also need to be sufficient time to publicise the meeting.
- Representatives are advised to discuss any meeting request with the KCC Community Engagement Manager at the earliest opportunity to manage community expectations and avoid disappointment.
- Even if it is decided that a Forum meeting is not appropriate, Forum representatives can still help members of the public by listening to, and sign-posting them, to an alternative way of resolving the issue or concern.

REMIT

28. **The Forums will consider reasonable matters relating to:**
- Services provided by Local Councils (County, District, Town and Parish);
 - Services provided by Police, Fire and Rescue and Health Authorities, and other public bodies, where these impact upon local communities;
 - Issues of interest or concern to communities in a significant geographical area of the Forum;
 - Issues where there is strong public feeling and a public Forum meeting is considered necessary to discuss and resolve this issue (discretionary);
 - The Forums do not have any powers to compel private organisations or businesses to attend a public meeting – but we will always try to arrange this where possible.
 - Identifiable outcomes from the calling of a flexible Forum meeting need to be identified.
29. **The Forums will not be able to consider any request if it:**
- Is, or has been, the subject of a formal or statutory consultation process (*unless community views have been omitted and it is still possible to feed into the process*).
 - Duplicates on-going work through a different mechanism (e.g. Community Involvement in Master Plan development; Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme).
 - Is substantially the same as a meeting held before, or been put to a meeting of the Council/Overview and Scrutiny, in the past 6 months (*unless significant new evidence/concerns have been identified since the last debate*).
 - Relates to court or legal proceedings
 - Involves the disclosure of confidential or exempt information
 - Is defamatory, frivolous, offensive, vexatious or discriminatory

- Refers to an individual complaint;
- Is to challenge a decision already made by planning or licensing.
- Only affects a small geographical area of the Forum.
- An anticipated outcome from the meeting can not be identified
- There are alternative, *and more effective*, approaches for dealing with the issue that should be explored, such as:
 - Elected members or relevant officers attending as a speaker at another organisations meeting.
 - Referring to another body such as Overview & Scrutiny or Dover Joint Transportation Board.
 - Town & Parish Council meeting.
 - Councillor surgeries.
 - Meetings with individual groups.
 - Liaison with council officers, service providers, external agencies.
 - Existing complaints schemes

STRONG COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

30. The Dover District Neighbourhood Forums will develop strong communication channels within all three-tiers of local government to ensure views expressed through the Forums are reported back to the Executive or other relevant body.
- The DDC Cabinet Member responsible for Dover District Neighbourhood Forums will brief SMT on issues arising from Forum meetings and will report back to the Forums. Any decisions required will be sought from Cabinet.
 - In addition KCC Officers will ensure that any issues or actions arising from a Dover District Neighbourhood Forum meeting will be fed back to the KCC Cabinet on a regular basis.
 - The Dover District Neighbourhood Forums have been added as a standing item for the Dover Joint Transportation Board.
 - DDC Scrutiny (Community and Regeneration) will add the Dover District Neighbourhood Forums as a standing item from May 2010.
 - All Town & Parish Councils will receive a briefing on relevant matters.
31. Just as important is communication between the Dover District Neighbourhood Forums and members of the community.
- Residents are welcome to contact any representative of the Neighbourhood Forums direct and contact details for the County and District Council member of the Neighbourhood Forum are available on agenda and DDC website.
 - Alternatively, residents can contact the officers involved in running the Forums. The initial point of contact is Anne Charman, KCC Community Engagement Manager and her contact details are:
 - Email: **anne.charman@kent.gov.uk**; Tel: **01622 696389**
 - DDC contact: Email: **neighbourhoodforums@dover.gov.uk**
 - Member of the public are also invited to join us half an hour before the start of a Neighbourhood Forum for refreshments and meet members and officers to discuss informally, either collectively or on a one-to-one basis, to any matters of interest or concern. They will also have the opportunity to talk to a representative from the Dover District Community Safety Partnership.
 - Links to agenda and notes from meetings are published on the KCC and DDC websites.
 - The KCC Community Engagement Manager also prepares an annual report of the individual Forums activities of the year, including details of grant funding, meetings and action.
 - The KCC database will be used to email agenda, notes and updates to members of the public who have registered their details.
 - Other forms of social media (such as Facebook) will be investigated to improve communication and help us reach out to all communities.

Dover District Neighbourhood Forum Procedure Rules

Disturbance at meetings

1. If a member of the public interrupts a meeting or otherwise behaves irregularly, improperly or offensively, the Chairman may request him/her to leave the room or order that he/she is removed. In the event of a general disturbance, the Chairman may suspend the meeting or direct that the public be excluded from it. No one so removed or excluded will be permitted to return to the meeting.

Discussion of Individual Officers

2. No discussion shall take place in a meeting about the terms or conditions of employment or the performance, or conduct of any officer of any of the Councils

Members' Interests

3. All Councillors including substitutes are expected to consider whether they have a personal and/or prejudicial interest in any matter under discussion on the agenda and declare it accordingly at the relevant part of the meeting.

Attendance List

4. Those attending Neighbourhood Forum meetings should sign the attendance list or ensure the clerk records their presence.

Meeting Planning

5. Meetings of the Neighbourhood Forums will take place in public at venues in the local areas at least two times a year, on dates and at times agreed by each Neighbourhood Forum.
6. The KCC Community Engagement Manager will invite all voting members of a Neighbourhood Forum to meetings by sending an agenda and accompanying papers to the address provided, normally at least seven clear days before the meeting and electronically wherever possible.

Agenda

7. The agenda for each meeting of a Neighbourhood Forum will normally include:
 - o notes of the previous meeting
 - o a report on actions taken and outcomes from the previous meeting.
 - o any reports seeking views or recommendations from the Neighbourhood Forum (if appropriate).
 - o questions submitted from members of the public or external organisations
 - o any item which a member of the Neighbourhood Forum or any of the councils wishes to be included on the agenda, provided it is relevant to the terms of reference and agreement has been given by the Forum Chairman.
8. The Chairman of the Forum, and Officers will liaise to prepare the agenda and the contact point for any matter relating to a Neighbourhood Forum meeting and agenda is its respective KCC Community Engagement Manager.

Voting

9. If requested, the Chairman will call a vote on any recommendation and the vote will be by a show of hands by voting Members of the Neighbourhood Forum.
10. If the votes for and against are equal the Chairman does not have a casting vote and therefore the recommendation falls.
11. Immediately after a vote has been taken a voting member may ask for their vote for or against a recommendation to be recorded in the Notes of the meeting.

Rights to Attend and Speak

12. Any Councillor and member of the public may attend any meeting of a Neighbourhood Forum and be given permission by the Chairman to speak and/or ask questions.
13. To ensure a fair and proper debate the chairman may request a speaker to limit the length of their address or the number of times they speak on a topic.

Attendance of Officers at meetings

14. It is expected that Neighbourhood Forum Chairmen will take the lead in pursuing actions resulting from Neighbourhood Forum meetings with assistance from officers as necessary.
15. Cabinet Members and Council officers will be expected to attend any Neighbourhood Forum meeting when asked to do so by the Chairman / Officers organising and where the topic to be discussed relates to their Portfolio/ service area. Such requests must be reasonable in terms of notice, demand and expectation.
16. A supporting officer from County and District will always be present at all Neighbourhood Forum meetings and non-public meetings. They will help plan, manage and co-ordinate the business for the Neighbourhood Forum, and will take notes of and actions from the meetings or assist a Town/Parish officer to do so.
17. A copy of the meeting notes to be drafted and agreed by representatives and published on the Internet no later than 14 working days after the date of the meeting

Issues of interest to more than one Neighbourhood Forum

18. Any follow up work on issues involving more than one Neighbourhood Forum will be the responsibility of all Chairmen and Officers involved.

Links with the public

19. In the half hour before the start of the meeting, Neighbourhood Forum members and officers will be available in the meeting room to discuss informally, either collectively or on a one-to-one basis, any matters that may be raised by the public present.
20. The agenda sheet for each meeting will include details of a telephone contact number and the electoral division of each County and District Council member of the Neighbourhood Forum.

E-Government

21. Links to agenda and notes are published on the County and District Councils websites:
 - o www.kent.gov.uk/your_council/have_your_say/local_boards/dover.aspx
 - o www.dover.gov.uk/neighbourhoodforums

Annual Report

22. KCC Community Engagement Manager will prepare a report of the individual Forums activities of the year, including details of grant funding, meetings and actions.

Purdah Period

23. It should be noted that following the publication of a Notice of Election, there are restrictions on the role and identification of councillors in Council publicity in the period leading up to the election (approximately six weeks). The general rule is that, once the notice has been published, Members will neither be named nor quoted in corporate communications and Neighbourhood Forum meetings postponed until after the election.

Periodic Review

24. The procedure rules will be reviewed periodically.

Rotation of Chairs – Dover District Neighbourhood Forums

N/B - After Year 3 the cycle will repeat.

Dover North	Chair	Vice Chair	3rd Tier
Year 1 (2007-08)	KCC	PC	DDC
Year 2 (2008-09)	PC	DDC	KCC
Year 3 (2009-10)	DDC	KCC	PC
Year 4 (2010-11)	KCC	PC	DDC
Year 5 (2011-12)	PC	DDC	KCC
Year 6 (2012-13)	DDC	KCC	PC

Dover West	Chairman	Vice Chairman	3rd Tier
Year 1 (2007-08)	KCC	PC	DDC
Year 2 (2008-09)	PC	PC (DDC)*	KCC
Year 3 (2009-10)	DDC	KCC	PC
Year 4 (2010-11)	KCC	PC	DDC
Year 5 (2011-12)	PC	DDC	KCC
Year 6 (2012-13)	DDC	KCC	PC

Deal & Walmer	Chairman	Vice Chairman	3rd Tier
Year 1 (2007-08)	KCC	T&PC	DDC
Year 2 (2008-09)	T&PC	DDC	KCC
Year 3 (2009-10)	DDC	KCC	T&PC
Year 4 (2010-11)	KCC	T&PC	DDC
Year 5 (2011-12)	T&PC	DDC	KCC
Year 6 (2012-13)	DDC	KCC	T&PC

Dover Town	Chairman	Vice Chairman	3rd Tier
Year 1 (2007-08)	KCC	DDC	DTC
Year 2 (2008-09)	DDC	KCC (DTC)*	DTC
Year 3 (2009-10)	DTC	KCC	DDC
Year 4 (2010-11)	KCC	DDC	DTC
Year 5 (2011-12)	DDC	DTC	KCC
Year 6 (2012-13)	DTC	KCC	DDC

Sandwich Area	Chairman	Vice Chairman	3rd Tier
Year 1 (2007-08)	KCC	DDC	T&PC
Year 2 (2008-09)	DDC	T&PC	KCC
Year 3 (2009-10)	T&PC	KCC	DDC
Year 4 (2010-11)	KCC	DDC	T&PC
Year 5 (2011-12)	DDC	T&PC	KCC
Year 6 (2012-13)	T&PC	KCC	DDC

* With agreement from the Forums, these deviated from the cycle but will return to form.

2010-11: Year 4

The new Chairs will take over when the 2010-11 round of meetings starts. This will after the June round of meetings, which were postponed from April/May 2010, due to the calling of the General Election and observing the purdah period.