



## Protocol for Dover District Neighbourhood Forums 2015-2016

### 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:
  - **Deal & Walmer Neighbourhood Forum:** Middle Deal, Mill Hill, North Deal and Walmer.
  - **Dover North Neighbourhood Forum:** Aylesham, Eythorne, Great Mongeham, Guston, Langdon, Nonington, Northbourne, Ringwoud with Kingsdown, Ripple, St.Margaret's at Cliffe, Sutton and Tilmanstone.
  - **Dover Town Neighbourhood Forum:** Buckland, Castle. Maxton Elms Vale and Priory, St.Radigunds, Tower Hamlets and Town and Pier.
  - **Dover West Neighbourhood Forum:** Alkham, Capel-Le-Ferne, Denton with Wootton, Hougham Without, Lydden, River, Shepherdswell with Coldred, Temple Ewell and Whitfield.
  - **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:
  - Engage with local residents, businesses and other community groups in the district;
  - Provide a key consultative mechanism between all the councils and with the public on policies, plans and strategies;
  - Assist councillors and other agencies to listen to and respond to their communities;
  - Discuss an issue of local importance or concern or resolve specific issues;
  - 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. The costs incurred in the operation and support of Neighbourhood Forums are shared between the Councils.

10. KCC and DDC share other responsibilities for the running of the Forums, which have been 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 from each Neighbourhood Forum area need to collectively nominate and agree on a representative for their forum area.
12. The nominated representatives from all three tiers are invited to 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 allow two-way communication between communities and agencies.
20. Communications should focus on outcomes and resolutions for local communities.
21. The Dover District Neighbourhood Forum Procedure shall apply (see attached procedure on page 6).
22. Copies of all agendas and discussion papers will be sent to Forum members at least 5 working days before the meeting. The taking of minutes at the forums will be arranged as appropriate.
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 are invited to 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 can hold at least two fixed public meetings a year, as detailed below. The dates for these meetings should be set in advance near the start of the Neighbourhood Forum year (1 April) and are to be widely promoted.

**You Decide**

- o A **Small Community** grant scheme is available from Dover District Council for each of the Forum areas, for community projects. The format may vary in format from year to year.
- o In Dover North the KCC Member allocates a proportion of the KCC Combined Member Grant towards an event that allows the public to vote electronically for the projects of their choice.
- o Dates, venues and timings for the “You Decide” events will be made available as soon as possible.

**Neighbourhood Forum Event**

- o These Forum meetings are an opportunity for local residents to communicate with representatives from various agencies in respect of topics of interest in their respective areas.
- o These forum meetings are designed to meet the community needs by providing information that is of local interest or genuine concern.
- o Members of the public are welcome to attend these meetings.
- o Dates and details of the Neighbourhood Forum meetings will be confirmed as soon as possible.

27. **Flexible & Responsive Public Meetings**

- o 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; if resources allow; in response to pressing **local issues** (as defined). A maximum of 10 meetings for the whole district can be held per year, this limit is due to resource and budget constraints.
- o Within this number, the Forums can hold joint meetings on issues of wider interest (at the discretion of relevant Forum boards).
- o 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.

**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 Liaison Officer (shuna.body@kent.gov.uk) 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 Liaison Officer.
- 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 Liaison Officer 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.

- 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

## **COMMUNICATION**

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 Leadership Team 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.
  - All Town & Parish Councils will receive a briefing on relevant matters from KCC.
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 directly and contact details for the County and District Council member of the Neighbourhood Forum are available on the DDC website.
    - Alternatively, residents can contact the officers involved in running the Forums. The initial point of contact is Shuna Body, KCC Community Liaison Officer: **shuna.body@kent.gov.uk**
    - DDC email contact: **[neighbourhoodforums@dover.gov.uk](mailto:neighbourhoodforums@dover.gov.uk)**
  - Members of the public have the opportunity to meet elected members and officers to discuss informally, either collectively or on a one-to-one basis, any matters of interest or concern during the Neighbourhood Forum meeting.
  - Where applicable, links to agendas and notes from meetings will be published on the KCC and DDC websites.
  - Officers will prepare an annual summary of the individual Forums activities of the year, including details of grant funding, meetings and action.

# **Dover District Neighbourhood Forum Procedure**

## **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 an interest in any matter under discussion on the agenda and declare it, and if necessary withdraw from the meeting, at the commencement of the relevant part of the meeting.

## **Attendance List**

4. Those attending Neighbourhood Forum meetings should sign the attendance list.

## **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 Officer will invite all voting members of a Neighbourhood Forum to meetings by emailing an agenda and accompanying papers, where applicable.

## **Voting**

7. 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.
8. If the votes for and against are equal the Chairman does not have a casting vote and therefore the recommendation falls.
9. 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**

10. 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.
11. 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**

12. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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.

## **Issues of interest to more than one Neighbourhood Forum**

15. 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

16. Members of the public are invited to join us for refreshments and the opportunity to meet members and officers to discuss informally, either collectively or on a one-to-one basis, to any matters of interest or concern during the Neighbourhood Forum meeting

### E-Government

17. Relevant information and links to agendas and notes, if applicable, will be published on the County and District Councils websites:
- o [www.kent.gov.uk/your\\_council/have\\_your\\_say/local\\_boards/dover.aspx](http://www.kent.gov.uk/your_council/have_your_say/local_boards/dover.aspx)
  - o [www.dover.gov.uk/neighbourhoodforums](http://www.dover.gov.uk/neighbourhoodforums)

### Annual Report

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

### Purdah Period

19. 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

20. The protocol and procedure for Dover District Neighbourhood Forums will be reviewed annually.

### Rotation of Chairs – Dover District Neighbourhood Forums 2014-2015

N/B – Every 3 years the cycle will repeat.

Neighbourhood Forum Year	Chair	Vice Chair	3 <sup>rd</sup> Tier
Year 7 (2013-14)	KCC	T and/or PC	DDC
Year 8 (2014-15)	T and/or PC	DDC	KCC
Year 9 (2015-16)	DDC	KCC	T and/or PC
Year 10 (2016-17)	KCC	T and/or PC	DDC
Year 11 (2017-18)	T and/or PC	DDC	KCC
Year 12 (2018-19)	DDC	KCC	T and/or PC

T and/or PC = Town and Parish Representative as appropriate for area (i.e. Dover Town, Deal & Walmer and Sandwich area).

### Protocol Review Dates

<b>Period</b>	<b>Reviewed</b>	<b>Status</b>
For 2013-2014	September 2013	Protocol circulated to all representatives after Neighbourhood Forum meeting on 4 September 2013. No comments received, therefore protocol agreed by way of no comments.
For 2014-2015	January 2014	Protocol agreed by all Neighbourhood Forum representatives present at meeting on 16 January 2014.
For 2015-2016	June 2015	Review by KCC and DDC officers to ensure document still fit for purpose. Distribution to Neighbourhood Forum Representatives for approval.